


JITNY AND THE BOYS

BENNET COPPLESTONE

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JITNY AND THE BOYS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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JITNY AND THE BOYS

BY BENNET COPPLESTONE

AUTHOR OF "THE LOST NAVAL PAPERS"

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NOTE

Somewhere in the North Sea, among her sisters of the Grand Fleet, broods a vast Dreadnought of the most exalted superness. From her armoured turrets stretch 15-inch guns, and over two of them, as a mother over twin babes, watches that Lieutenant of R.M.A. whose personality has inspired this simple story.

Somewhere in London dwells the most kindly and sympathetic of publishers, who, eighteen years ago, first made the present writer, an unknown stranger, free of the pages of "The Cornhill Magazine."

Upon the shoulders of these two—the Blue Marine and the Kindly Publisher—I ruthlessly place the entire responsibility for the appearance of this book.

B. C.

January, 1916.

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BOOK I
PLAYTIME

JITNY AND THE BOYS

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF JITNY

SHE was not named Jitny at the beginning. At first she was simply "The Bus." But the Boys one day saw an American cinema film, depicting two tramps in their "Jitny Bus," and she became at once seized of a name which, though in itself meaningless, seemed in some subtle fashion exactly to describe her endearing qualities of undignified, noisy, but ever faithful efficiency. So she was known as Jitny from that day henceforward.

Jitny cannot be regarded as beautiful even by the eyes of affection. She is very low and very wide. Seen in profile she is giddily rakish—the Boys affect to liken her side-lines to those of a Bleriot monoplane—but the illusion is lost when one contemplates from the front her broad, squat apron. She is a lady who should always sit for her portrait in profile. Jitny is not designed for speed, yet attains it; she is not equipped

for power, yet develops it when tuned and humoured and coaxed with crafty hand on the throttle; she is not a thing of beauty, yet to Dad and the Boys she is a joy for ever. There are few counties in England and Wales and the South of Scotland which have not reverberated to the strident roar of her chain or to the quick bark of her busy exhaust. Horses used to caper with apprehension at her approach before Dad fitted a new silencer and subdued her warlike explosions—too like those of a Maxim-gun for really dignified progression.

The Boys resembled the Three Bears of fairy story. They were Big Peter, Middle-sized Tony, and Wee Roddy. Big Peter, brilliant, dashing, the terror of school-masters, yet deeply learned in the things that matter—such as the management of every kind of motor engine, and the exasperating art of combining the worst possible predictions of pastors and masters with the best possible results in public examinations. Middle-sized Tony, talkative yet shrewd, bumptious yet sound in grain, the editor of a home-made magazine at twelve and the author of a military handbook (published at the cost of grave persons) at the mature age of sixteen. Wee Roddy, silent and contemplative, a fount of serene wisdom based upon the profound study and never-failing recollection of the “Children’s Encyclopædia.” It was

the heavy task of Dad to select a motor vehicle which would at once satisfy the widely divergent aspirations of the Boys, and adapt itself to the limitations of a slender purse.

Big Peter at seventeen held a motor-car licence, and used it upon every lawful and most unlawful occasions. It was never safe for anyone to leave a motor cycle or car unattended by the roadside when Big Peter was out seeking for means of transport. He was a perfect product of the new motor era. He would seize and at once master any automobile of whatever size, power, or weight. They were all alike to him. When he was not on flying wheels testing some racing monster for its proud but apprehensive owner, he would happily drive a laundry van about its rounds in the great city. When he went upon a motor hunt one never knew whether he would return in temporary charge of a motor bicycle or a War Office five-ton lorry. He handled either with equal facility.

Big Peter's views on the matter of their own motor were large and generous and quite untrammelled by questions of finance. His desire was for a Car, the bigger and faster and more modern the better. He was, however, willing to accept anything on account, however small or old-fashioned, provided that it had a good engine. He did not often

write letters, but when he troubled to set pen to paper his meaning was never for a moment in doubt. "I should advise you," he wrote to Dad, "to buy a Prince Henry racer. You will never regret it. I drove one the other day. She was nominal twenty-four horse, developed fifty at least, and went seventy miles an hour. The clutch was so sweet that I took her away from rest on top gear. She roared up the steepest hills on direct third. A Prince Henry is the thing for us, but if you can't run to it—though mind you have a try—there is a lot of fun to be got out of a motor bike." Then he digressed into a discussion of the best makes of motor cycles with their several characteristics, harked back to the Prince Henry and its sweet clutch, and ended by generously leaving Dad a free hand with the assurance that any old bus would suit him so long as one could get a move on it.

Middle-sized Tony was much less catholic in his tastes, and was evidently consumed with anxiety lest his new, and as yet unused, motor-cycle licence—he was then just turned fourteen—should rest in ignominious disuse. His ardent blood ran cold to contemplate the dreary æons which separated him from the age of seventeen and the right to own a car-driver's licence. Tony wrote that both economy and the greatest happiness of the greatest number impelled Dad to the pur-

chase of a vehicle which could be called a motor cycle and driven by a boy of fourteen without attracting too markedly the attentions of the police. He urged that a three-wheeled vehicle filled the exact bill; it was cheap to buy and run—"you know, Dad, we all cost you a beastly lot at school"—it could be registered as a motor cycle and would involve the smallest amount of tax; and it could be driven by one holding a motor-cycle licence. "I am sure, Dad, that Mother would be able to drive a little thing like that, and if she did how jolly for you both during term time." The ingenuous Tony clearly proposed to substitute himself for Mother during the holidays.

Wee Roddy, aged ten, had not yet extended his ambitions to the driving of motors. A car for him meant the prospect of tours with Dad and staying at hotels. Hotels meant breakfasts where he could order boiled eggs—a passion of his—and where no one would say him nay. All he asked for was some means of transport to these abodes of bliss.

Dad had his own peculiar problems, most of them common to those fathers of families whose boys grow alarmingly fast and become more costly with the flying years. He could not really afford to buy any kind of motor vehicle, even the least expensive. But as he frequently remarked to Mother: "If one

never buys anything till one can afford it, one never gets any fun till one is dead." In his day Dad had owned two motor cars. One was a steamer which devoured fuel, tyres, and water at so terrifying a rate that he was always seeking for water by the roadside or writing cheques for supplies. She had, too, an incurable habit of selecting crowded streets for the exercise known as "blowing out the safety plug of the boiler." While amusing herself in this fashion—the steam pressure was 450 lbs. to the square inch—she would clear a whole street of traffic and drive even the police into a terrified search for cover. The other was a heavy, slow, but faithful servant which had been dismissed with tears when the Boys began to depart for expensive schools. Since then the family garage had been empty, and for many a year all thoughts of humming wheels and the wide, open road—surely the most delicious sounds and sights which a mechanical civilization has brought to the senses of man—were beaten down. But they remained there in the depths of poor Dad's mind, seeking for an opportunity to burst out stronger than ever for their long suppression. And though Dad was no nearer affording to buy a family motor than he had been years before, the advent of the little cars awoke new hopes within him. Surely, he reasoned, he could with some

squeezing and some relaxation of prudence run to a little thing. Besides, the Boys would love it, and the world belongs to the young.

In specious ways, beloved by man, Dad sought to suppress the remonstrances of his financial conscience. Mother, of course, said bluntly that however little the thing was, its cost would not fit within the family budget. Women are not specious; they are hard, practical creatures, wholly devoid of sentiment, considering only rent and rates, gas and coal, clothes and school bills. The hum of flying wheels and the wide, open road awake no craving within them when they mean the outpouring of pounds sterling. Mother was, of course, right—mothers always are—but Dad had his way, which is the way of dads, so it was decided in the conscience-oppressed but obstinately wicked mind of Dad that Jitny should be bought. The Boys far away in their several schools heard of the decision and cheered loudly. Mother did not cheer.

Though Dad had determined upon wrongdoing, he did not seek wholly to trample upon conscience. Since crime there must be, it should be but a little one. So he sought after the smallest and least expensive vehicle which would combine thorough efficiency in movement with the capacity to carry two persons comfortably and three with

some physical compression. For some weeks the superficial charms of a second-hand car had their attractions, but Big Peter was very firm with him. "Get a new one however light and low-powered," wrote this motor sage. "Then you know where you are. If you try to buy a second-hand one you will be badly had. You made a horrid mess over that old steamer and lost enough to have bought a decent little bus. If you can't run to a Prince Henry—you would if you once felt her clutch, it is like milk—get a . . . (the make of Jitny). It is not fast, it hasn't any power worth speaking of, it is noisy, but it is very, very reliable, and it costs next to nothing." And Dad, who thought more of Big Peter's judgment upon men and cars than of that of all his grown-up friends, submitted to his astute guidance. So feeling very like a criminal making plans for a neat, efficient murder, Dad despatched his order, and was promised the delivery of Jitny on a fixed day at the beginning of the next summer holidays. Then, the deed being done, this wicked man fell to dreaming of the hum of wheels and the white ribbon of sunlit roads, and in his waking hours made lists of spare parts—all of which he bought until, as the Boys said, he could, at a pinch, have rebuilt Jitny by the roadside.

The Boys were all at school in England,

and Dad, exiled by a harsh fate in the crude, cold, unpolished North, always fled away to his own fair land when the shackles of daily duty could for a while be broken off. It was arranged that Jitny should be delivered over to his unskilled and rather frightened hands at noon on one day late in July in the outskirts of London, and that he, accompanied by the hardy Tony, should thence issue forth upon their travels. Dad was greatly thrilled by the spirit of adventure when at last he journeyed south by train. It was the year before the War, that last year of peace when the few who knew heard always a murmur as of the tramp of armed nations. But Dad, though he was one of those who knew, left behind him as he journeyed southwards the ring of hammers upon Dreadnoughts' rivets and the whirr of long steel ribbons which built up their mighty guns. He was on holiday and Europe was still at peace.

Big Peter was away in camp with his O.T.C., the last of the peace camps, but Middle-sized Tony and Wee Roddy, free of school, awaited the coming of Dad with palpitating eagerness. For did not Dad mean Jitny and the freedom of the broad white road?

It was noon on the appointed day, a bright fair day. Pacing up and down at the rendezvous Dad and Tony awaited the coming

of Jitny. It had seemed a cold, repellent quest to seek for Jitny in the works of her makers or in the big showroom of some busy dealer. Far better was it to watch the cluster of traffic and to pick out from it their Jitny coming obediently out of wide space at their call. So they watched thrilling with expectancy. Again and again the cry went up, "There she comes!" but disappointment followed and clock hands moved on. It was ten minutes past the hour, ten minutes, ten ages; attention had for an instant flagged when there came to them the loud hoot of a horn and a low, grey beast, low, squat, and wide, the faithful beast which was to bear them over thousands of happy miles, slid up to their feet. She had come, it was a great moment!

A minute passed in eager explanations, and then Dad climbed in, followed by Tony, who perched himself precariously on the edge of the seat. A touch of the throttle, a loud beat of the engine, and away flew their own Jitny bearing them and the news of her coming to the others who waited a mile away.

It can rarely have happened that a wholly unknown motor has been taken over by wholly unskilled pilots with less instruction in its mysteries. Barely ten minutes passed before the driver, who had brought Jitny from London, departed hurriedly to catch

a returning train, and left his charge in the hands of the new owners. Dad, under his guidance, performed a wobbly circuit of suburban roads—maybe a quarter of a mile—and then he was gone. But Jitny remained, silent, awaiting the deft touch which should reawaken her busy life. Dad and the Boys walked around her, admiring, but they did not yet dare to lay clumsy hands upon her or peer into her greasy vitals. The courage born of lunch must first be sought ere the first thrilling journey be undertaken.

When the moment came for the trial of their skill they bent to the task with hardihood. Dad, who had owned and driven the cars of which we spoke a few pages since, took command—by comparison with the Boys he was an expert, rash word to describe his unfathomable ignorance! “Retard the spark,” he ordered. “Ay, ay, sir, retarded it is,” replied the first mate, Tony. It wasn’t, for Tony had pulled back the gas-throttle in mistake for the spark-lever. This little error having been corrected and the gas-throttle generously opened, Dad grasped the starting-handle. “Now watch,” said he. “I pull her gently up to the top of the compression stroke”—he rolled out the learned words with glib tongue—“and then, she’s off!” He followed his prescription, but with little confidence, for he had in his day experienced the shock of a

back fire. Gently he pulled her to the top of the compression stroke and paused. Nothing happened. Then he did it again, somewhat more firmly. Still nothing happened. Then he paused to reason things out. Dad was great at reasoning things out, and, to be just, usually arrived at a correct solution after complicated processes of thought. "If she has gas and a spark she *must* start. Now has she gas and a spark?" He gave the throttle a wider opening and pulled the engine slowly over two or three times. "Yes, she has gas, I can smell it, but where is the spark?" He pulled her over two or three more times. "My old motor used to start this way, why won't this beast?" He took off the engine-cover and regarded her interior in grave thought. After a while a glimmer of comprehension revealed itself to him. "My old engine had a coil and battery which gave out a spark at the firing-point; this engine has a magneto which develops its own current. Perhaps the slow business is wrong, and I ought to turn her over quicker." He tried a quick turn over, but the engine was new and stiff, the compression was strong, and his wrist had not yet learned the quick, deft flick which wakes a magneto into life. Dad ground away at the handle, faster and yet faster, blisters rose upon his soft hands, he perspired copiously, for the day was very

hot, and yet Jitny remained impassively silent. The occupants of the house in which they were staying were all upon the pavement, suggestions, inexpert and for the most part futile, were poured upon him, but Dad sullenly ground on till he was forced to pause from sheer exhaustion. Motor cars passed; now and then kindly drivers would get down and essay a spell at the starting-handle of the stubborn Jitny, but they all failed as completely as had Dad. Despair began to wrap itself about the lately burning hearts of the Boys; were the joyful visions of freedom and rapid progress to give place to a holiday of grinding, grinding, at Jitny's thrice detestable handle? Then Wee Roddy, silent, contemplative, a fount of wisdom, slipped away, saying nothing, but presently returned accompanied by a tall and grimy stranger. "Dad," piped he, "I have brought a garage man." It was a crushing humiliation, but as skilled aid had come, Dad, hot, blistered, bitter with exasperation, secretly blessed his small, wise son. The man from the garage swung the engine, and not getting a firing stroke, went at once to the sources of trouble. "You have much too much air," said he; "give her rich gas to start." Then he went for the sparking plug, unscrewed it before their eyes, and showed how the points were too far apart. "She will run like this but not start easily." He

correctly set the points, returned the plug to its place, and then stooped to the handle, already smeared with Dad's red blood. Bang! She was off! It was a joyful but humiliating moment. It revealed in bright flashes to the mental eyes of Dad that there were a lot of things he had yet to learn about motor engines. Dad and Tony took their places in the car for their first desperate adventure alone, and all was ready for the start.

When "Oh, Mother, Mother!" cried little Jane—she had beautiful names, but was called Jane to subdue that haughty pride which is so dangerous in women things—"Oh, Mother, what will they do if the works run down?"

But Dad had already determined that if he could help it the works should not run down until he returned safe and sound; he would keep that engine running lustily and would not for the present essay any more experiments in starting. For the poor man's hands were very, very sore.

The first few minutes were a delirious nightmare. Jitny has a sensitive mouth, and the steering gear, being direct, responds with startling suddenness to the slightest impulse. She swayed in drunken curves under Dad's heavy grasp; he hauled her this way and that as if she were a barge, and the wide road was all too narrow for her

blind staggers. Dad's dull and apprehensive eye was glued upon every passing vehicle, and as the hand must always follow the eye, Jitny showed an embarrassing longing to make the closest acquaintance with every other occupant of the road. Then Dad, in terror of collisions, took to scraping the pavement on his near side, and narrowly escaped running down a bright little school-girl who jumped out before him. To this day he remembers her thrown-up, frightened face as he tore out the clutch and stopped dead with grinding brakes. In his haste he nearly stopped the engine, too, the one catastrophe which he dreaded beyond everything.

"This is rather sport," remarked Tony placidly. "We are getting lots of fun for our money. Shall I take her for a bit?"

But if Jitny was to be employed as a modern Juggernaut, Dad preferred to be responsible for the slaughter or maiming of his fellow-creatures, so that Tony's bland proposal went unanswered.

Shaken but resolute—for he had planned to drive to the Isle of Wight on the following day—Dad essayed a spell of slow but safe progress on the low gear, and discovered, as every apprentice upon a new bicycle discovers, that the way to steer with accuracy is not consciously to steer at all. The hand will instinctively follow the eye. So, in-

stead of looking at obstacles which he desired to avoid, he bent his attention upon the gaps which he wished to go through, and Jitny, urbane and kindly, responded quietly to his sub-conscious efforts. With growing knowledge came some little confidence, and Dad, pushing in his top gear, slid out into the wide road which runs from Surbiton to Leatherhead. With every passing minute came greater assurance. Jitny, left to run freely, without coarse tuggings at her mouth, seemed to thread in and out of traffic by herself, to become at one with her driver, and to respond instantly and delicately to his wishes. Presently came a moment of delicious exhilaration, of revelation into the capacities of their Jitny when handled with sympathy and understanding. The tram-lines and thick traffic had been passed, and a hill of gentle slope opened out before Dad and his passenger.

“Let her out,” cried Tony eagerly.

Slightly apprehensive, but no less eager, Dad thrust forward the throttle, and then Jitny, tucking up her broad skirts, flew up that hill with a roar and a rush which set their blood dancing and swept away all anxieties in regard to the morrow. Truly she held her track, curving lightly as other vehicles approached; the rocking and intoxicated staggering had all vanished. She climbed with undiminished speed to the top

of the hill, and then Dad checked her, proceeding sedately down the following slope. The hearts of the two motorists sang with joy: the worst was over, they had mastered the elements of their new craft, Jitny was no cantankerous tyrant, but a true, willing friend, a bright untrammelled month of holiday lay before them. In that moment they tasted of the wine of life.

"By Jove," cried Dad, "I know now how to drive the darling."

"Me, too," exclaimed Tony, glowing. "Don't you think I might take her for a bit?"

But Dad, gripped by the fascinations of his new toy, stuck to his privileges as owner. He would exact his full rights for that day and the next, and then, in the seclusion of the Island, the Boys might enter into Paradise. But not till then.

Their triumphant progress was continued as far as Leatherhead, and then, turning with difficulty, during which delicate operation the engine more than once came within a beat of stopping, they sped at a fair pace on their homeward way. Dad and Tony agreed that the speed exceeded forty miles an hour, though both knew full well that it could not be much more than twenty. The absence of an exact speed recorder permits of generous scope to a flattering imagination. Motorists, in their estimates of speed, are

very like their brethren of the rod and line. No man of sense ever places a very fine fish upon the unkind scales.

When Surbiton was reached they found quarters in which Jitny could rest for the night and renew her vigour for the labours of the morrow. It was a proud and joyous pair that hurried homewards to relate their exploits to the sceptical crowd which had witnessed their ignominious start. It was in vain that in glowing words they chanted the praises of Jitny, her speed, her urbanity, her flexibility—"the whole way to Leatherhead on top gear, Mother"—her silence—Heaven forgive them!—her smooth, almost luxurious style of progress on rough roads, not omitting their newborn skill in her management. "Dad is not bad, Mother, but wait till I get hold of her. He does not nearly get the most out of her."

"Well, well," said Mother, closing her ears to the torrent of words—it is a pity that women have no imagination; this explains their failure to achieve the highest in art—"perhaps you will get to the Isle of Wight without broken bones, but I shall not sleep to-night for thinking of you."

"Oh, Mother," cried little Jane—too young to have developed the true feminine caution, "may I go with them? I can squeeze small, and there's lots of room."

"Not if I know it," said Mother. "If

my husband and one son must smash themselves up, I suppose they must, but I insist on keeping my only daughter."

The motorists drew away from these unsympathetic surroundings, seeking some quiet spot where they could discourse without restraint of Jitny, her surpassing perfections, and the glittering prospects of the morrow. Enthusiasts should always herd together. The cold world has ever dubbed them horrid bores.

CHAPTER II

A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM

THE morning broke fine and clear. It was the true English summer weather, bright, glowing, gracious in its outpouring of generous warmth. It was the weather which the Southern folk hug to their bosoms with joy and gratitude, and for which they humbly thank whatever gods there be. When a rare day of such weather ventures to intrude into the chilly atmosphere of the North—for eleven months of the year the unwilling home of Dad—it is savagely resented as a “heat wave.” Blinds are drawn down to discourage the poor unwitting Sun, which, broken in spirit at the frosty welcome, departs hence as speedily as may be. Even the Sun cannot vex Northern souls and bodies with impunity.

But Dad, though a dweller in the North, is a child of the South, and to him the Sun is an ever-welcome and joyous friend.

At an early hour he pulled aside the night-blinds and let in a bright shaft which struck upon Mother, and awoke her from a troubled sleep in which she had dreamed of the limp

bodies of Dad and Tony disentangled from amidst the shattered wreck of Jitney's crumpled frame. She, too, loved the Sun, and just then she was glad to be quit of dreams, so Dad's too early exuberance was pardoned, and he escaped the reproaches which he justly deserved.

Breakfast for the travellers was a hasty meal, but Wee Roddy, with ample leisure before his train was due to start, toyed lovingly with his boiled egg—one only was permitted, though he anticipated with fervour a tour when the heedless Dad would allow him two. Wee Roddy will always get the very utmost out of life. He can stretch out the delights of a banana to cover half an hour of enjoyment.

Mother's face had on the forced smile with which the Spartan matrons must have sped their menfolk to the wars of old, but Dad and Tony felt only the joys of anticipation. "We will see you at Lymington," they said, "if she runs as well as she did yesterday. If not we will turn up sometime at Totland Bay. We shall be all right." Little Jane wept, not from grief at parting, but because she still eagerly desired to share their perils and glories. Wee Roddy neither wept nor smiled, the egg absorbed his whole attention.

The farewells over, Dad and Tony hurried to the resting-place of Jitny. They did not

start her themselves, for their garage friend of the day before was at hand, and Dad's fingers, still sore, shrank from rough usage. "We won't start her ourselves if we can possibly help," he murmured. "Not much," assented Tony. "You made a rotten mess of it yesterday." The Boys always bear themselves as if Dad were their powerful but rather foolish elder brother; they agree, however, that on the whole he is a very decent old chap.

Dad's confidence in his ability to manage Jitny had somewhat evaporated during the night, but a few minutes of quiet progress, during which she behaved in a manner most submissive, brought peace to his nerves. A spell of careful driving along the Portsmouth Road amidst trams and heavy waggons did him good; it gave him experience and a sense of mastery, so that when the highway opened out beyond Thames Ditton and they put on speed for the rush up the long Esher Hill, he felt almost as much at one with Jitny as if she had been his bicycle of ten years before.

"She goes fine," said he. "But we must be cautious, Tony, very cautious, and take no risks."

"Cautious it is," reluctantly agreed that hardy one. "But let her rip when you get the chance. By Jingo, how she does lift along!"

Soon they had sped over the Fairmile, wound through Cobham Street, and swung out on to that grand stretch of road which leads through Ripley to Guildford, and thence over the Hogs-back's razor edge to Winchester. In former days Dad had bicycled upon this road scores of times, but never had he been so acutely responsive to the spirit of this typical English highway as on this bright summer morning. We do not recognize the gifts of the gods until they are withdrawn from us. For years Dad had been cut off from the wide, smooth roads, the lovely embowered villages, and the old grey towns with centuries of English history "sticking out all over them," as he put it. In the North the works of God are glorious and incomparable, but those of man are for the most part mean and hideous. There are few villages in that raw, untidy land, unless a stiff stretch of mean hovels, dabbed over with whitewash, stuck flush up against the road, without a tree, flower, or leaf to soften the line of sordid ugliness, can be called a village. There are no roadside inns, no hostelries at all in the cosy, hospitable English sense, save only in the few tourist centres. Absent, too, are the little country towns, so exactly typical and expressive of ordered civilized life, which delight the traveller through the length and breadth of the fair counties of England.

Dad had never loved the Southern country so passionately as on this day of his return to it, when the vigorous thrust of Jitny's busy engine bore him through Ripley and up the long switchback slope which ends at the top of Guildford High Street. They reached Guildford within the hour, and slowly slipped down the declivity of the High Street, with the engine running free and all the brakes on front and rear engaged. Jitny's powerful brakes inspired her driver with an added confidence. It was in Guildford High Street that the steamer, which years before he had dared to own and drive, had "blown a plug" and simultaneously had burst a tyre. Not even a Zeppelin raid could have aroused more startling a sensation, and Dad now reflected with deep satisfaction that Jitny was too ladylike to do the one and wholly incapable of doing the other.

At Guildford they turned aside and passed through devious dangerous ways to the hill which winds up the Hogsback, whence the prospect of wooded plains, lying far below, seems to stretch to the horizon. Here they were free of side-traffic—for the road runs as it were on the coping of a roof—and Dad submitted to Tony's injunction to "let her rip." Jitny obediently ripped, mile after mile, reeling them off in two minutes and twenty seconds apiece—no rapid speed, perhaps, but giving an exhilarating sense of

flying movement in a little car of less than six hundredweight.

Presently Aldershot opened out far down to the right, and Tony, unoppressed by the chances of breakdown—from which the mind of Dad, totally ignorant of his engine's works, was never wholly free—proposed a visit to Big Peter in camp there. It was a fascinating suggestion, repelled with difficulty and only on the ground that as the objective of the adventurous pair was Lymington, it were well to make sure of arrival. So they turned away from the seductions of Aldershot, and the dazzling prospect of surprising Big Peter, and submitting to the guidance of Prudence—a tiresome creature, ever a killjoy—they passed through Farnham, thickly studded with breweries, and out beyond where the hop-fields skirt the road for many a sweet-smelling mile.

By this time Dad had become almost skilful in the guidance and manipulation of his charge, and as he felt the beginnings of stiffness, due to the cramped unhandiness of his method, he suggested a halt and a rest by the roadside.

“We will stop at the top of a hill, just over the slope, and then we shall not have to grind at the confounded handle. The car will run down by itself, and I will start the engine on the clutch.”

They stopped and got out, and while Dad

smoked his pipe the man and boy discoursed upon the wonders of the day's travel and the kindly merits of their now silent friend.

"What would happen," observed Tony at length, "if anything went wrong which we did not understand?"

"My dear Tony," replied Dad, "there is not a blessed thing that could go wrong which we do understand. We know absolutely nothing about this car except that it runs like an angel. If it stopped from some defect, we could only sit by the roadside and cry."

"There are plenty of cars passing—we could ask someone to help us."

"We could," said Dad, "and we would, pride be hanged. You have almost the resource of Wee Roddy."

"Queer chap, Wee Roddy," remarked Tony. "He told me last night that he wasn't going out with you till we had mucked about and learnt something of the car. In the meantime he has bagged your book on 'Hints and Tips for Motor Cyclists'—this is a sort of motor cycle. He means to read it, and then, he says, he will always know at once what is the matter, and will be able to tell you. Fancy a kid of ten like that——"

"Don't you make any mistake, Tony my son. Wee Roddy is a great man. He thinks his own thoughts and pays not the smallest attention to what anyone else thinks. He

will know as much about cars as Big Peter in a year or two."

"Oh, Big Peter thinks he knows a lot," said the younger brother disparagingly, "but he has never seen this car, and by the time he comes from camp I shall be able to teach him. That's some comfort. He's too cocky for my taste. After all he is only two years and nine months older than me, not three years by a good bit."

They ran on down the hill, and at the bottom nearly fulfilled Mother's dream of the night before. The road turned to the left, and as they swung round, a two-horse dray, loaded with full barrels, closed their path. It was, of course, on the wrong side. Not ten yards interposed between Jitny and a violent ending, and well was it for her and for the travellers that she had strong brakes on every wheel. Even so it was a near thing, and the horses' heads hung over the wind-screen when Jitny stopped under their noses. Tony was white and speechless, but Dad's first words were, "Thank goodness I didn't stop the engine." It is a strange thing that risks of the road which make the toes of a passenger curl do not affect the driver in the slightest degree. The one is absorbed by his job, the other has leisure to think of perils.

"Observe," said Dad, as they went on their way, "that a left-hand corner is always

the more dangerous, since careless brutes who are cutting it meet one face to face. Moral: never cut a right-hand corner, and always look out for other people doing it when you turn to the left."

It is a delightful road, that by which the motorists made this their first long run, and they enjoyed to the full every inch of it. Through Alton they went and past the home of the Tichbornes at Alresford—it dates one's middle-age to show an interest in the Tichborne Case—and then inclined to the left over the rim of the wide chalk basin which holds the incomparable City of Winchester. "What do you know about King Alfred?" suddenly asked Dad, as they caught a glimpse of the Great King's city lying in the hollow of the hills.

"He burnt some cakes," replied Tony.

"Exactly. He burnt some cakes. That is perfectly typical of English history as taught in schools. Alfred founded the Royal Navy, and the University of Oxford, and he set true the bases of the realm of England upon which it rests secure to-day. Yet all is forgotten except some tuppenny ha'penny story about a neatherd's wife and some cakes. Don't you know anything else about him?"

"No," said Tony. "We don't do English history at Westminster."

"I should be surprised if you did. We

have the most wonderful country and Empire that the world has ever seen, and yet do not trouble to teach our children the first thing about them."

It is a steep and nasty hill which dips down into Winchester, but Jitny's sedate descent caused her crew no anxiety, and presently they were in the streets of that city which within the space of one square mile typifies a thousand years of English life. Were the whole of England destroyed by earthquake, and Winchester alone left undamaged, future generations could still realize and understand the unchanging English spirit. The soul of Alfred has brooded over Winchester for a thousand years—no fabled delights of Elysian Fields could tempt that mighty spirit away from his own city—he is there, always there, unchanging, unconquerable, unafraid. And Winchester means now England, and England the far-flung Empire; from the seed has grown the mighty tree, and over all broods the soul of Alfred.

"He burnt some cakes!" *Nom de Dieu*, what a people! No wonder that the Germans have failed to understand us.

At Winchester they lunched, and afterwards, to their joy, got Jitny going again without trouble; it was a real triumph. Tony, intensely modern and just then a Philistine—a year later England was to owe

everything she possessed to her public-school Philistines—cared little for the old grey stones of Winchester, but the story of the underpinning of the Cathedral appealed to his mechanical soul. Dad told how this mighty pile had for hundreds of years rested on no firmer foundation than a marsh stiffened with brushwood and beech logs; how the precarious supports had been eaten away by damp and time till the whole vast fabric leaned and cracked and was threatened with total collapse. He told how bit by bit, yard by yard, under water for the most part, the brushwood and beech logs had been cut away and the walls carried down to the hard, everlasting clay forty feet below. Never have modern mechanical skill and appliances been bent to a more pious and noble work. So long now as Alfred's Navy preserves inviolate our shores, so long will Winchester's Cathedral stand secure. Tony was frankly interested, though he thought the work rather costly to lavish on an old cathedral when they could have built a new one with less money; but Dad had hopes that a few more years spent at the old school under the shadow of Westminster Abbey would modify his early judgment.

They travelled by the Southampton Road, turning off when nearing that city and striking straight for Lyndhurst and the New Forest. The Forest is to the Boys a Paradise

of childhood. Many summer holidays, after they woke to conscious life, were spent in its midst, it will ever remain among their most delightful recollections. "Good old Forest!" remarked Tony, as they came out of Lyndhurst and ran down the straight road, set between lines of trees, which leads in a bee-line to Brockenhurst. "What a great time we had here as kids! It was a sort of Heaven to Peter and me; Roddy is too young to remember much about it." Tony never forgets that four immense years separate him from the age of Wee Roddy. This comforts him greatly when he reflects upon the two years and nine months only by which Big Peter is his senior.

The journey seemed nearly ended—Lymington, their port of departure—by barge—for Yarmouth in the Isle of Wight, was close at hand, barely a mile distant, the afternoon was still young—when disaster, sudden, crushing, irremediable, overwhelmed them. Never was Fate more unkind. Jitny had run smoothly and cheerfully, sliding quietly down the slopes, and throwing every ounce of her lusty energy into the ascent of the hills. She seemed to be unfailing, unexhaustible. Their ears had become trained to her loud engine barking, and to the many incidental sounds which are the voice of machinery in active movement. But suddenly there arose a new, an ominous, and terrible

sound, a shriek of groaning, complaining metal, a cry for help so plain that it pierced even their untutored ears and struck a chill to their ardent hearts. Gurr! Gurr! Gurr! Dad threw out the clutch, but the noise continued. The engine must be stopped. They drew in to the side of the road and hastily jumped out. Dad seized the handle and pulled the engine slowly round; gurr! it cried, gurr! gurr!

Dad listened and thought busily. He knew little of motors, but he did know that a noise like that was unnatural and hideous.

"She cannot have seized," said he, "for if she had the piston would be jammed. The valves can't be broken because the engine was running all right when this frightful noise started. The scrape is in the engine and not in the wheel-bearings. I think," he concluded solemnly, "that the piston rings must be broken and scraping against the cylinder."

"Is that very serious?" inquired Tony anxiously.

"Very serious. For if we went on the broken ends of the rings would score grooves in the cylinder and ruin it. There is nothing for it, Tony old man, but to push the bus into Lymington, go to a garage there, take her down, and wire to London for new rings."

"You are sure it is the rings?"

"I am not sure of anything. But that

seems to be most likely. At any rate we've got to take the engine down and find out, and we can't do that here. So come on, Tony, we must just shove her to Lymington. It is only a mile, and, thank goodness, she only weighs about six hundredweight."

To the day of their deaths Dad and Tony will remember that frightful mile into Lymington. The day was very hot and the road thick with dust. On the level—when there was any—Jitny gave little trouble, and downhill they had only to steer and keep a hand upon the front wheel brakes. But the slightest upward slope was torture, and anything resembling a hill a nightmare of hideous toil. At some hills they could only ascend yard by yard, Dad pushing while Tony steered, with many halts, during which they chocked up the wheels and wiped the streaming sweat from their eyes. What would have happened to them without their friend the baker, no man can say. This golden-hearted baker was returning from his rounds when he overtook them toiling. He could not tow them for they had no rope, but he got down and bent his shoulder to the job of shoving, and when at last, after an hour of toil, they emerged into the haven of a Lymington garage he refused to take a tip. May happiness and prosperity, the love of wife and children, ever attend that thrice blessed baker of Lymington! May his bread

never go mouldy and his customers always pay their bills !

Dad's first care was to rush to a telegraph office, and to send a lavish, urgent appeal to Jitny's builders for new rings to be despatched in hot haste to Lymington. He also wired to Mother at Lymington Pier Station—where her train was almost due—setting forth their troubles and present resting-place. Then he hurried back to the garage, but just as he rejoined Tony a fearful thought went through him like a bullet.

“To-day is Saturday,” he gasped, “and Monday is Bank Holiday. The car people will not get my wire till Tuesday, and at the earliest we shall not receive the rings till Wednesday morning. Wednesday, and this is Saturday !” It was too much, too utterly cruel. If Tony had not been a big boy, fourteen great years old, he would have wept.

The owner of the garage was very busy, he could not lend them help for an hour, but after that he would see what was the matter. Trouble piled upon trouble. “Luck has deserted us,” groaned Dad. “We never had any,” bitterly declared Tony, out of whose universe of joy the bottom had incontinently fallen.

It was a very sad, almost heart-broken, pair of travellers that lifted off Jitny's

engine-cover and drew from its box their case of virgin tools. The sun still shone, but its light was quenched in their hearts. The world was a black, ungrateful waste, and human life a weary pilgrimage. Motor-ing was a rotten game. Tony was for leaving the garage man to dismantle the engine at his leisure, but Dad scorned cowardice such as this.

“I feel,” said he, “much as if I were given a patient and a set of knives and told to operate forthwith for appendicitis. But I am desperate enough even for that. Why then be beaten by a wretched single-cylinder engine with a pain in its belly? At the worst we shall learn a lot about the brute’s inside.” In this bitter, ungrateful fashion did Dad speak of their once beloved Jitny.

When they came to work seriously the difficulties did not seem to be so very tremendous. They tackled them bit by bit, exploring cautiously. The inlet and exhaust pipes had to be detached, the valves lifted—it was lucky that Dad had the makers’ description of Jitny’s works in his pocket—and the holding-down bolts of the cylinder unscrewed. Then, while Tony held the fly-wheels steady, Dad triumphantly wriggled the heavy cylinder off the piston and its rings.

Dad carefully bore the mass of cast iron to a safe spot, and returned to find Tony

staring blankly at the now protruding piston.

"Take out the broken rings," ordered he.

"There aren't any broken rings," replied Tony.

The boy was palpably right. There lay the rings in their grooves, peaceful, shining, unbroken. Dad's eyes travelled slowly over the gaping crankcase and thence to the litter of nuts and tools. Sure of his diagnosis he had gallantly and successfully penetrated into Jitny's intestines. Was it possible ——?

A little figure trotted into the garage yard, and Wee Roddy's serene, rather drawling, voice broke the painful silence.

"I've come to help," he announced.

"Where on earth did you spring from?" exclaimed Dad.

"Well, you see," drawled Roddy, "Mother got a telegram, and she read it out, and the steamer was just going. So I told Little Jane to tell Mother that I was going to help you, and I ran all the way here. You see, if I had asked Mother she might not have let me come."

"She might not," assented Dad grimly. "But as you are here, you are here. Don't get in the way, we are busy."

They pursued their hunt for the elusive scrape. While Dad pulled the engine slowly round Tony guided the loose piston up and down, and listened with ear close to the open mouth of the crankcase. Still the raucous

gurr continued, less loud, perhaps, but insistent.

Wee Roddy stood on the offside, keenly watching the operations and prying into the fascinating works of the motor. Never had he seen the gaping inside of an engine, and the tangle of oily metal gratified him intensely. His youthful soul loved a thorough mess. The slow movement and the scraping went on. The investigators had forgotten the presence of Wee Roddy until his voice broke in upon them once more.

"What is that bright mark on the fly-wheel?" he asked, pointing.

"Oh, nothing. Don't bother, old chap."

"It runs all round, Dad—like a scratch."

"I'll look presently. Don't worry."

But Wee Roddy's inquiring mind was still bent upon that bright scratch. He rubbed a greasy finger upon it as the flywheel revolved, and then watched to see if the mark were renewed. His interest grew, and kneeling down he peered into the narrow gap between the edge of the flywheel and the sheet iron underbody.

"Stop, stop," he shrieked. "I've got it, I've got it!"

Dad and Tony stopped. "Oh, do get out of the way, Roddy."

But Wee Roddy, who had been poking his small fingers under the flywheel, clambered up and offered Dad what looked like a lump of black grease.

"Here it is!" he cried, dancing on his toes, every scrap of his small body tingling with triumph. "Here it is! I found it under the flywheel. It was scraping, and made the bright scratch I saw. It is a sort of nut."

Dad snatched the lump from his son's hand. It was a small steel ball. "Hold the piston, Tony," he cried, and once more pulled round the handle. The flywheels revolved, slowly, sweetly, silently. The scrape was gone!

Then Dad straightened his weary back, looked at the steel ball in his hand, looked at the dismantled engine and the litter of nuts and tools, looked at the round, glowing countenance of Wee Roddy, and spoke:

"Well, I'm——" He paused.

"Oh, don't mind me," savagely growled Tony.

Dad walked to the end of the garage, beyond the ears of the Boys, deliberately pronounced the naughty word three times, and slowly returned.

"Well, I'm—— We've pushed this frightful beast a mile, ten miles, in the hottest part of a hot day. We've hauled along six hundredweight, six tons, till we are nearly dead with heat and thirst and weariness. We've laid miles of dust with the sweat of our brows. We've wired for new rings and

given Mother fits. We've spent an hour taking down that accursed engine, and we shall have to spend another hour putting it up again. And all because a miserable little ball, which some careless ruffian of a workman left in the underbody, jolted beneath the flywheel and caused it to scrape. We could have found it in two minutes, and saved ourselves three hours of distress and hard labour, if we had only had the sense to look. What do you mean, Roddy, you impertinent little worm, by making fools of us like this?"

"You see, there was a bright scratch on the flywheel, and I dirtied it with my finger, and the scratch came back, so there was something underneath. I looked for it and pulled it out."

"Just so. You looked for it and pulled it out. What could have been simpler? But why didn't we look for it and pull it out two hours ago? Roddy, you have much to answer for. You have impiously knocked down your revered father and your haughty elder brother, and have jumped with both feet upon their stomachs. If I were a hard, just man you would be sent to bed without any supper."

Wee Roddy's face became very grave. "I only had sandwiches for my dinner," he murmured, "and I haven't had any tea, and Mother said I might have a boiled egg

with my supper if I was very good and amused Little Jane on the journey. And I have been very good, and——”

Dad laughed as he put an arm round the little boy's neck. “Cheer up, old friend,” he cried. “Did he have his leg pulled? Roddy, my great infant, we will leave here at once and have tea, and you shall eat yourself speechless if you like. And at supper you shall have two eggs, two whole eggs all to yourself. You won't be happy till you are thoroughly sick.”

“If I have the two eggs, I shan't mind being sick afterwards,” cried the delighted Roddy. “Wasn't it a good thing that I came to help you?”

“No,” snapped Tony—someone has to keep these kids in their place. Tea was a joyous meal, but it might have been observed that Tony watched Roddy with asperity, quick to detect and suppress any signs of that uppishness which in the young must sternly be squelched. Afterwards they put up their poor, harmless engine, explained to the garage man that their surpassing skill in diagnosis and repair had rendered his assistance unnecessary, and betook themselves to the barge and the wide Solent. Tony explained several times in the course of the journey that his foresight in the selection of Jitny had saved Dad fully ten shillings in transit fees. They arrived late,

tired, but filled with the joy of life, and even Mother's well-founded protests failed to interpose between the maw of Roddy and the fulfilment of Dad's rash promise. Happily, there were no untoward consequences, though Wee Roddy was prepared to meet them with resignation.

When Tony went to the room which he shared with Roddy he found that investigator sitting up in bed reading "Hints and Tips for Motor Cyclists."

"Roddy," he said severely, "this is mere swank. Put that book away at once and go to sleep."

CHAPTER III

THE GALLANTRY OF BIG PETER

“WELL, how goes the new bus?” asked Big Peter.

It was dusk upon an evening a week later. The steamer had come in from Yarmouth and cast up at Totland Bay the tall form of Sergeant Peter of the O.T.C., girt about with water-bottle and haversack, and bearing on one broad shoulder a nobbly kitbag. His civilian luggage had, of course, been lost on the way; Big Peter's luggage always was. A khaki uniform was rare in those days of peace, which now seem so far distant, and many curious eyes were turned towards that upright, flat-backed figure which even then bore itself with true military dignity. Big Peter's muscles had not yet been hardened by constant discipline, and when in mufti he shambled like an overgrown puppy, but put him into khaki and on the instant he stiffened into a soldier.

For a moment he bent like a steel spring to embrace Mother, whose head scarcely reached his shoulder, and then sprang sharply to attention. Tony, a private in the Corps,

had already relieved his senior officer of the kitbag.

“Well, how goes the new bus?”

“Fine,” replied Dad. “We did not bring her down; it was too dark, and we are too many for her. You shall try her to-morrow.”

“Do you drive her, kid?” inquired Big Peter, with an indescribable air of kindly condescension—the beautiful unbending of the sixth-form boy who addresses his brother of the fourth. Tony had steered Jitny half a dozen times round the Freshwater circuit, out by the station and back by the seafront, a mile, maybe, of tarred roads, but had not yet essayed a longer journey. Nevertheless, it was with the careless air of the expert that he replied:

“Oh yes, every day. She’s not a bad little bus. Not much speed, you know, but I get all there is out of her.”

On arrival at the house, Big Peter must instantly pay a visit to Jitny in her shed, and as it was then dark must survey her with the precarious aid of lighted matches.

He was pleased to approve her proportions. “She’s bigger than I expected,” he observed, “and her lines are not bad. One ought to knock thirty-five out of her.”

When they entered the house the passages were echoing to the cries of “Peter, Peter, Peter, Peter . . .” *fortissimo*. This was Little Jane welcoming from the bed her beloved big brother.

Peter ran upstairs, and Little Jane, who was standing up in bed, hurled herself upon his neck. "Oh, Peter, Peter, tell me a story."

"This is a nice welcome, young lady!" said Big Peter. "You set me to work the minute I arrive. What is the story to be?"

"Tell me one of the stories Daddy used to tell you when you were a poor little boy without any brothers and sisters." The thought of this early period in Peter's life always overwhelmed his small sister's mind with a sense of unutterable pathos. That Peter should have been all alone, and that they—Tony, Wee Roddy, and Little Jane—should not have been at hand to worry and to comfort him, was a harrowing reflection. She had long since decided that only by the most persistent of attentions—including demands for a story every night—could she make up for the long years of solitude suffered in Peter's far-distant past.

"What story?" asked Peter, whose mind was a blank.

"Tell me a Derby," cried Jane. She climbed out of bed and mounted upon his knee. "Telling a Derby," though in its fifteenth year of successive childhood, was as fresh as when first invented by the long-suffering Dad.

Peter (singing to the tune of "Tarara-

boom-de-ay," and bumping Jane upon his knee in time with the air): Gallopy, gallopy, gallopy, gee, gallopy, gallopy, gallopy, gee, etc.

"The geegees all go down to the Post, and when they get there the Starter says, 'Geegees, are you ready?' and the geegees say, 'No.' But the Starter says, 'Go!!!!' Then they are off!"

(Singing) Gallopy, gallopy, gallopy, gee, etc.

"First a blue geegee gets in front, and then a green geegee, and then a purple geegee, and then a magenta geegee, and then a crushed-strawberry geegee, and then a cardinal geegee, and then an amaranth geegee, and then a moly geegee. But none of the geegees can stay in front very long, for when they get there they find the others there and have to go back. This goes on for about a mile, and then a great big fast geegee gets in front, and no one can catch him up because he goes—"

(Singing) Gallopy, gallopy, gallopy, gee, etc.

"So the great big fast geegee wins the race. And that is called a Derby."

"Why is it called a Derby?" demanded Little Jane.

Big Peter laid down Little Jane in bed and tucked her up. "Now you must go to sleep." She yawned, settled down, and

murmured sleepily: "Peter, when you were a poor little boy without any brothers or sisters, where were we?"

"That's too difficult for me, Jane."

"Does Daddy know?"

"I don't expect he does."

"Does Mother know?"

"I don't expect she does."

"Does Tony know?"

"I am sure he doesn't."

"All right. I will ask Wee Roddy. I expect he will have read about it in the 'Children's Encyclopædia.' Peter, how do you make cabbages?"

"I don't make them, they grow."

"How do you make, how do you make——"

But Peter crept out of the room and fled downstairs.

At supper, after Peter had taken the edge off his prodigious appetite—astonishment at Big Peter's vast bulk disappears when one watches him eat—he was entertained by the story of the journey down from Surbiton, and especially by the ignominious entry into Lymington.

"You were a nice pair of innocents to be in charge of a motor!" commented he, smiling kindly from lofty heights of knowledge upon Dad and Tony. "Broken rings, indeed. Rings hardly ever break, and if they did you would not know it. It seems to me that Wee Roddy had the wits in that party."

"We know that, Peter," remarked Dad humbly. "But need you rub it in?"

"Sorry, old man," said Peter. "It was very plucky of you to bring her down at all; in your place I should not have cared to try it. But, cheer up, you will be all right now. I will take her over myself."

Although this was not quite Dad's view of the future programme, he was grateful for Peter's qualified approval. Tony, on the other hand, writhed in helpless agony. Peter, in his schoolboy eyes, was a vastly more important personage than Dad, and he trembled lest the immutable fiat of that potentate should cut him off from Jitny altogether.

"Tell us about the camp, Peter," broke in Mother.

"All right, Mother," cried Big Peter, patting her hand. "It is a shame to bore you with motor shop." So he fell to talking of his life in camp, of the hot, strenuous days and the cold nights under canvas; of the military round which was then to him but a form of sport, but which for him and for thousands like to him was soon to become the dominating factor in their lives.

Big Peter tackled Jitny next morning in a fashion which to Dad seemed alarming and not a little indelicate. He was possessed of an insatiable curiosity to pry into the innermost mysteries of her being. Under

his hands she was stripped of all decent reserve. With spanners and screw-drivers, he showed how she breathed her mixture of air and petrol gas, how she compressed and fired it, how she busily cast forth the used-up products. He explored the leads through which she sucked oily food into her stomach, whence it was tossed about her hungry vitals. He desired to probe with impious fingers into her very soul, the magneto, from which flashed electric life, but Dad stayed his hand. "No, thanks," said Jitny's owner firmly. "Leave to the poor thing one last refuge for her virgin modesty. You have made even the hardened exhaust pipe blush red with shame already."

The inspection over, Peter led Jitny forth, "to try her paces," as he put it. With Dad as passenger he sped towards Freshwater, winding in and out of narrow ways, and rounding sharp corners, with an assurance truly terrifying. He slipped serenely, untouched, through gaps which another coat of paint would have rendered impassable, and he made her engine buzz till Dad feared that it would leap wholly from out the groaning frame. But Jitny, though sorely tried, seemed to know her master, and to submit obediently to his stern exactions.

Dad and Big Peter were both seekers after perfection. No sooner had they become familiar with the inner workings of Jitny

than they busied themselves about improvements. Peter declared that, though a faithful and willing beast, she was a bit crude, deficient in those refinements which bring comfort and immunity from trouble. So they began to devise expedients which would make their Jitny an example to her fellows. They had once or twice been troubled with a choked jet; the carburettor refused to supply to a panting Jitny the breath of her life, and they decided that the petrol supply required a more efficient system of filtration. The cap of Jitny's petrol tank is connected with a long, hollow brass rod which screws into the base of the tank. It is pierced with a hole about an inch from the screwed end, through which the petrol flows, and is designed to prevent any sediment in the tank from running into the petrol pipe. A good arrangement but deficient, in their view, in the higher virtues. They decided to fit a petrol filter over the hole in this brass rod. Peter said that the racing motorists, his friends, filtered their petrol through chamois-leather, to remove all dirt, and he proposed a chamois-leather filter for Jitny. So they bought a piece of very fine leather, wrapped it round the brass rod where the hole appeared, placed a piece of wire gauze outside the leather, and lapped the filter to the rod by means of copper wire. It was a most business-like arrangement and looked first-

rate. "Now," declared Big Peter, "we shall have no more choked jets. Nine troubles out of ten are due to choked jets or sooted plugs. We have removed altogether one of those common causes of delay on the road."

"Peter," said Dad, "you are a great artist!"

A day or two passed before the filter was tested, bright, hot days when it seemed even to our enthusiasts a more pleasing amusement to swim in the sea, and take sunbaths on the shining beach, than to breathe whirls of powdered chalk upon the Island's dusty roads. During these days the Boys renewed an early acquaintance with a girl, a year or two older than Peter, with whom as children they had played. Tottie—the Boys gave her that name, it was not her real one—was, it appeared, struck to the heart by the great form and clear-cut, handsome face of Big Peter. He, though of mind and body mature beyond his years, seemed wholly unconscious of her busy attentions. He was, it is true, sensibly flattered by her adroit usage of the address "Mr. Peter," and he always bore himself with grave courtesy towards her—there was never a trace of self-conscious shyness about Big Peter—but he remarked more than once that "she took up a deuce of a lot of room on the beach." From this Mother, learned in such matters, concluded

that wheresoever Peter went Miss Tottie was sure to go. But Tottie, undeterred either by the cold politeness of Big Peter or by the lightning flashes from Mother's eyes, pursued her quarry with unfailing ardour.

Dad, when told by his anxious wife of the peril which encompassed their eldest son, only laughed. "Peter is a boy of seventeen, but the level head of him is that of a man of twenty-seven, or thirty-seven, or forty-seven. Any age you like. Depend upon it, Big Peter knows the length of Miss Tottie's foot."

One morning Big Peter had cut the beach and the attentions of Tottie, and with Tony had taken Jitny for a run. When they returned Miss Tottie, of course, met them and, equally of course, overflowed with admiration of Jitny. "What a sweet little car!" she cried, "and how beautifully you drive, Mr. Peter!"

This speech was unwise. To the eye of affection Jitny is neither sweet nor little; she is large, bold, and business-like. And as for Peter's driving, Miss Tottie knew not whether it was bad or good.

"She's a good little bus," observed Peter. One has to be polite, you know.

"Oh, how I should like to have a ride in her! We have no car, and I do so want to see the Castle at Carisbrooke."

It was appallingly crude, but Miss Tottie judged Peter to be a boy of seventeen, and knew not that his head was that of a man of twenty-seven, or thirty-seven, or forty-seven. Any age you like.

Peter thought rapidly for a moment, and then he said, "I will take you there this afternoon."

"Oh, how kind you are, Mr. Peter! But will your father let you have the dear little car?"

Big Peter groaned in spirit. The foolish woman was making his sacrifice very difficult. "My father is all right," observed he. "I will take you this afternoon."

They escaped from Miss Tottie and sped homewards. At luncheon Big Peter recounted the interview. "What!" cried Mother, her maternal claws flashing out to guard her young. "You are taking that girl to Carisbrooke in the car?"

"Yes," calmly replied Big Peter. "It had to be. Better get it over."

Dad caught Mother's anxious eye and laughed. At brief intervals during the remainder of the meal he laughed again and again. All inquiries as to the fount of his mirth were repelled.

"May not a miserable man, burdened with an expensive and unruly family, laugh sometimes?" protested he, with indignation. "Upon my word, when I look at you disturbers of my peace and consumers of my

substance, I wonder that I can raise anything but tears. Leave me alone."

"Dad's a silly old man, isn't he?" observed Peter, smiling at the puzzled children.

At three o'clock Tony brought up Jitny to the door—he had a passion for the duties of chauffeur—and shortly afterwards Miss Tottie arrived. She was carefully disposed in the car by Big Peter, wrapped about with rugs, and the whole family—except Mother, unaccountably detained—waved farewell to the travellers. Dad went indoors, found Mother glowering in the dining-room, and laughed yet once more. "Now mark my words," he exclaimed. "Something will go very badly wrong with that car."

It was a little after three when Peter and Tottie, in the car, left for Carisbrooke, fifteen miles away, and no one expected to see them return before six. But six o'clock came and passed, and then seven o'clock, the sun set and the shades of night drew on, and yet the well-known bark of Jitny aroused not the echoes. It was past eight and nearly dark before Big Peter, alone, could be seen strolling casually up the drive.

"Why, where's the bus?" cried Tony.

"At the garage near the station," replied Peter. "A front tyre went down and I left her there."

"I trust," put in Dad blandly, "that you saw the lady safely home!"

"Oh yes, of course. That is what made me rather late."

"But you've been gone for hours," exclaimed Tony, wondering, "and Carisbrooke is only round the corner!"

"We had some trouble," said Peter shortly, and would give no explanation until the younger boys had gone to bed.

"Now, Peter," cried Dad, "out with it all."

Big Peter and Dad exchanged a comprehending smile, and the youth—who until that moment had been silent, almost embarrassed—began the story of his adventures.

"After leaving here I took things easily until we reached the Newport Road. She was only a girl, you know, and might be scared by my racing tricks. But she asked if I couldn't go really fast, as she loved speed, so I shook up the bus a bit and let her rip. Then the trouble began. Whenever we passed anything a bit close, or turned a corner on two wheels, she would let off a babyish scream and make a grab at my arm. I put up with this once or twice, but the next time she did it I just stopped the car and talked to her like a father. Didn't she know, I inquired, that to grab at a driver's arm was the most dangerous thing possible? I said it was no business of mine to prevent her from breaking her own neck, but would she kindly do it some other time when I

wasn't about, and when it didn't mean smashing up the car? She could go on or go back, whichever she liked, but if she was going on, my arm must be left alone."

"You put it just that way?" asked Dad curiously.

"Just that way. She seemed a bit snuffy. I said she might scream as much as she liked if that eased her any; but I noticed she didn't, though I did try her a bit at some sharp turns. She didn't call me 'Mr. Peter' either, for quite a long time. I noticed that too."

"Little cat!" observed Mother, with emphasis.

"It wasn't a bad run to Carisbrooke," resumed Peter. "We arrived about four, and climbed up to the gate of the Castle. There we left the bus and walked about the inside of the Castle. It is a jolly place. She said that as I was so clever, I must know all about it, so I laid myself out to be polite and do the honours. I showed her where Charles I. was confined, and where they cut his head off."

Dad started, but remembered that they do not teach English history at Westminster.

"I showed her lots of other surprising things—where, for instance, Oliver Cromwell lighted a candle which none of his soldiers was able to blow out—and she said that she had no idea Carisbrooke was so interesting."

"Come," muttered Dad; "the girl has points after all."

"She didn't know any better," growled Mother.

"We came at last to the steep steps leading up to the Keep, and she asked would I help her up? So I took her arm and hauled. She doesn't look much of a weight, but she was pretty hefty, I can tell you. We looked out over the ditch where the old guns are, and I said they were put there to keep off the Germans when they invaded England. She said that she wouldn't be afraid of the Germans if brave soldiers, like me, were at hand to protect her. She loved soldiers, she said, and wasn't khaki sweet? Then she sprained her ankle, and said she could not possibly get down the steps unless I carried her."

Mother's face at this point in the narrative was Gorgon-like, but Dad signed to her not to interrupt.

"I said," resumed Peter calmly, "that she was a bit too hefty to carry in my arms down such steep steps, but if she would get on my back and hitch up her hobble skirt so that I could get a grip on her knees, I would do my best."

"Oh, Peter, Peter, how could you?" groaned Mother, but Dad laughed joyously. "Did she accept this handsome offer?" asked he.

“Not a bit of it. The ankle seemed to recover, and she walked down quite briskly. Then we left the Castle, picked up the car, and went down to the village to tea. It was a jolly fine tea, with lots of cakes and watercress. Dad, you owe me two shillings.”

Dad passed over a florin. “It is cheap at the price,” said he.

“After tea we started out for the run home.”

“What time was that?” inquired Dad.

“A little after five. We did not take long over tea, though we ate a lot. You know the very steep hill up out of Carisbrooke? We started to climb that on the low gear, and then our troubles began. About half-way up the engine gave a gasp and just petered out. No petrol. There was lots of juice in the tank, I looked to see, so I thought the jet must be choked. I backed the car into the hedge—it was a tricky business on that slope—got out, flooded the carburettor, and she started all right. But fifty yards higher up she gave out again. I had to stop her on the standing brake, and was a bit scared lest she should career off backwards with Tottie, while I was getting out. I chocked up the wheels as soon as I got out. After a bit the carburettor flooded again, the engine started and we moved off, but in another fifty yards the blessed bus spluttered and sobbed and stopped again.

I couldn't investigate on that beast of a hill, so I just got her going again and again—about six times, I think—and at last reached the level at the top. The tank was nearly full, the jet wasn't choked, and yet she wasn't getting gas. It was a bit of a problem."

Peter stopped and gazed at Dad, who nodded gravely once or twice.

"A bit of a problem," he agreed. Then he wrote a line on a piece of paper and handed it to Big Peter, who grinned. Peter's grin is most expressive. "Yes," he observed, looking at the paper. "You're not far wrong."

"When we got to the top," resumed the youth, "I told Tottie to sit tight while I explored. I said there must be an air-lock in the petrol pipe, so I took it off and blew through it. Then I took down the carburettor and cleaned it out. These things took me about half an hour, and every two minutes Tottie asked if I should be much longer."

"I suppose it didn't occur to you to take off the cylinder?" observed Dad solemnly.

"No, I leave that sort of treat to you and Tony. At last I started up the engine, and let her run a bit to see if everything was right now. She ran for a minute and then gave out, just as before. Tottie muttered something which sounded like 'Idiot!'"

"I said then that there must be water in the petrol, and that I would walk back to

Newport and buy a fresh supply. I told Tottie she would be all right in the car till I returned. She said she would be happier alone. Not very polite, I thought. So I left her there by the roadside and walked back down the hill."

"Peter, Peter," said Dad reprovingly. "That was a bit steep, old man!"

"It was steep," innocently returned the big youth—Peter can be blandly and beautifully innocent when he likes—"not bad to go down but the deuce to climb up with a heavy tin of petrol on a hot day. Dad, you owe me two and tenpence!"

The money was passed over without a word.

"When I was half-way up the hill, coming back, it flashed upon me what was the trouble."

"Oh, Peter, Peter, not till then?" murmured Dad.

"Not till then," answered Peter, with a face of stone. "When I got back to Tottie and the car I pulled off our confounded chamois-leather filter, which was stopping the petrol from coming through—it had worked into the small hole and choked the pipe—made a pretence of filling up the tank, for Tottie's benefit, and then started away home. By that time it was half-past six, and I reckoned to be back by seven. We ripped along fine till we came near the

turning down to Brook, and Tottie had begun to sit up and take notice—she was pretty grumpy for a while—but then we had more trouble. The off-front tyre went down flat. I apologized to Tottie, who said that boys ought not to be allowed out with cars which they did not understand. It was a bit rough on me—everybody is liable to punctures. Tottie said she would stay in the car while I mended the tyre. If she had had the sense to help I could have saved a quarter of an hour. As it was, I must have taken three-quarters' over that repair. Every five minutes she asked if I had nearly done. It was an exasperating business. The sun had set when I had finished, and Tottie murmured something about her people not knowing where she had gone. It seems that the trip with me was what the novelists call 'clandestine.' It was a pity I did not know this before, I might have played the Gay Lothario stunt a bit more smartly. But it was too late now to do the fond lover business. I was about fed up with adventures, and we did not talk much for the rest of the journey. Near the Freshwater station there was a loud bang, and the tyre I had mended blew out. I suppose I must have nipped the inner tube when putting the cover on. As it was then nearly dark, I just drove the car on the rim into the garage there, and walked up. I saw Tottie home; she was in a pretty

bad stew about what her people would say, but I cheered her up all I could. I said she'd had lots of fun for her money, and when was she coming for another run? She just stamped her foot and rushed into the house without saying good-night. I don't think that Miss Tottie is much of a sportsman," he concluded contemplatively.

"A remarkable journey," observed Dad, and choked suddenly.

"Most remarkable," gravely replied Big Peter. "Funny about that petrol filter, wasn't it? It has not solved the problem of preventing choked jets."

A long silence followed. Dad was trying not to laugh, and Mother was aching to ask questions. At last Big Peter got up. "I'm rather tired," said he; "it has been a busy day. If you two don't mind I will go to bed."

He went. Dad also got up. "Come out into the paddock, Mother," he said; "I want to laugh, but am afraid of waking the children."

They walked about the paddock beside the house. It was a fair, cool evening, bright with stars. Dad laughed his fill, not loud but deep.

"What do you make of it all?" asked Mother.

"This, my dear," replied her husband. "Your eldest son is a young demon, and

was properly punished by the tyres going down. They were accidents all right, no one ever had a puncture on purpose, but the way he spun out that trouble on the hill was really abominable. Of course he spotted it at once. I fancy that Miss Tottie is about fed up with Big Peter, which is precisely what he intended to bring about."

"Oh, I cannot believe that our little Peter could be so deceitful!"

"You will have a lot worse things to believe before we have done with that young ruffian. He has a very subtle sense of humour, and is so bland and innocent that his victims never know when he is pulling their legs. Sometimes I feel no small suspicion that he is working his wicked will upon me."

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Upstairs Peter was giving to the wakeful Tony a condensed but graphic account of his day out with Miss Tottie.

"I could kick myself for putting that silly filter on the car, and then for not spotting at once that it was stopping up the petrol flow. I wouldn't confess this to Dad for anything, especially as the old man twigged the cause of trouble before I was half-way through the yarn. He would never tire of rubbing in his superior acuteness. So I just led him on to think that my delay in finding out the trouble, and my absurd

journey to Newport for a fresh tin of spirit, were all part of a deep design to score off Tottie. He believes this now all right. Can't you hear him laughing outside in the paddock? He is telling Mother what a smart fellow he is. Poor old man, he is an awfully decent sort, but we must keep him from getting above himself. To tell the truth, I rather like Tottie, and I am going to take her for another run."

CHAPTER IV

A PAIR OF ZEALOTS

ONE is apt to dwell with the persistence of a lover upon that glorious August in the last year of peace, when the sun shone gaily throughout the whole month, and the world seemed free from care. The pale shadows of the coming horror were already visible through the sunlight, but we tried to be blind to them, or to persuade ourselves that, like other shadows, they would pass away harmless. It was the last long summer of the old life which we shall never know again. When one looks back now upon that gay season of English levity — of the characteristic English refusal to believe what we do not wish to believe—one feels that there was beneath our hedonism a solid base of unconscious wisdom. Why go to meet one's troubles? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. And Young England perhaps fought the more bravely, and died the more cheerfully, for that glowing playtime in 1913.

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The Boys had a great time; each day they glowed with the joy of life, and declared that never had they had such a time. Mother, seeing the joy of her young in their new friend Jitny, forgave Dad the financial recklessness of her purchase, and Dad—what was more difficult—came almost to forgive himself. Had he known then that this was the last year of youth for Big Peter, he would have forgiven himself abundantly.

The Boys careered joyously over the whole length and breadth of the Wonderful Island, the Island which is as intimately bound up with their childish recollections as is the widespread Forest upon the opposite shore. Their playgrounds were always the Island and the Forest, and where in the world can more delightful playgrounds be found? The Boys crossed and recrossed the Island until it became all too small for their ambitions. With ever-growing experience, Jitny had become utterly their servant, responsive to their every will; she bore them with such certainty and speed that, as Peter said, "No sooner does one get really going than one falls over the edge of this footy little Island." They explored every road and track which would give passage to Jitny's wheels. They knew the secluded villages of Brook and Briggestone and Chale as intimately as they did the Alpine Pass of Niton, the scarped hillside of Ventnor, the wide

parade of Ryde, and the chalk cliffs of Sandown. Many a pious pilgrimage was made to little Bonchurch, that jewel set beneath the Undercliff, whither they had all been borne as infants, where first their childish eyes had beheld those Narrow Seas which were the beginning as they may be the end of England's naval heritage. Here they were born again, sons and daughter of the sea. When in the far years to come age overtakes them—horrid thought—they will, we believe, with children and grandchildren, journey very often to Bonchurch in the Isle of Wight, and to Langley by Fawley, in the New Forest, and there renew for awhile the joys of their youth.

The razor-edged flints of the Island's chalky roads were very hard upon Jitny's rubber feet, and Dad began to be anxious lest his tyres would not bear up for the long journey which he and Peter proposed to make through the whole length of England, to his abiding-place in the cold North. Not his home; this was always in the gracious South. But he had not the heart to limit the journeys of the Boys, who day after day drove Jitny as if machinery and rubber were as everlasting as their youth. The Day was for them, the Morrow and the punctures for him.

The northern shores of the Isle of Wight; which look out over the Solent and Spithead to Hampshire, are closely studded with forts,

part of the defences of Portsmouth. Two of these were quite near to the house where they lodged, and on many evenings the search-lights flamed from them, meeting the beams from Hurst Castle opposite. Sometimes the big guns would roar in blank as destroyers sought by night to test the narrow ways of the Solent for an attack on Portsmouth, and the Boys, filled with ardour, would watch the game which had at that time much in it of serious practice. It was just about that time when, inspired by the lights and clamour of war, Big Peter and Tony conceived themselves called by their country to hunt for spies. The country had recently passed through one of those intermittent spy scares which had worried for a while the least suspicious people in the world. The English never suspect lying or meanness or spying till the evidences are thrust upon them; their sporting spirit refuses to believe that others will resort to the dirty tricks impossible to themselves; no people are more readily imposed upon and slower to think evil. But even the English people had come hardly and reluctantly to see that they had allowed themselves to be encompassed in a network of espionage which might ere long endanger their safety. To the Boys it had occurred suddenly that to employ Jitny in a hunt for spies would be the most glorious of games, and would, moreover, bring to

them the deep satisfaction of acquitting themselves like zealous patriots. Big Peter, though he had the head of a grown man, was at heart a boy when it came to a game, and Tony, deeply serious, soon grew convinced that he was consecrated to the service of his country in the hour of her need. This gave him extraordinary satisfaction. When the two elder boys explained to Wee Roddy the object of their searches and the pressing danger from spies, that sage inquired:

“But what can the spies do?”

“They make drawings,” replied Tony, “of all the roads, and rivers, and bridges. They mark down the strategical points”—blessed word, strategical—“learn all about the railways and the telegraphs and where the forts are placed. They do a frightful lot of the most dangerous things. If they are caught they are shot instantly. This shows how dangerous they are. When we catch one, I hope they will let us see him shot.”

“Well,” said Wee Roddy, “if I was a spy I shouldn’t take all that trouble. I should just buy a big map. All the things are on the map. Then I should make lots of money and should not be shot.”

Though they had a secret, but never admitted, respect for the wisdom of Wee Roddy, they rejected his pedestrian views with just contempt. Of what use would it be to hunt for spies in the recesses of a map-

seller's shop? No, the spies they were after were a bold, desperate lot who properly rejected all aid from the labours of map-makers, and sought their information at first-hand on the wide earth, where they might be discovered and incontinently shot. So Roddy's unenterprising programme of "Spying without risk," was severely discountenanced.

Big Peter and Tony gravely notified Dad that they would need the car a great deal for pressing national work—"His Majesty's Service," as Tony put it—and would he please order in a copious supply of petrol. That patient burdened ass meekly did as he was bid, asking no questions, but well knowing that in due course he would be gratified by the story of their labours. Equipped now with munitions, the two Boys resumed their exploration of the Island, and throughout every trip their eagle eyes sought for spies that they might fall upon and devour them.

"How," inquired Wee Roddy one day, when his big brothers were turning over their plans in his presence—as a rule they rather shunned the searching inquiries of the small sage—"How does one know a spy by sight? What does he look like?"

They had often been puzzled to answer the same query when it had presented itself to their own minds, but Tony, whose duty it was to keep Roddy in his proper place, scoffed lightly at the question.

“Of course one knows at once. Spies always have a nasty, treacherous, hangdog look. They sneak about with their tails between their legs.” Wee Roddy was mystified. It had seemed to his penetrative mind that a spy, to be of use to his employers, to earn lots of money and not get shot, should be of simple, guileless appearance, got up, say, as a farm labourer or a nursemaid, someone so plainly lifted above suspicion that he could pry without risk into the deepest secrets. Roddy could see no use in risks. Why must a spy be hangdog, and why have a tail? He might as well have SPY printed visibly on his back. It was a deep mystery. Wee Roddy considered the problem and resolved that should he ever become engaged in this strange business, when grown up, he would conduct it upon improved principles of his own invention. In the meantime he played contentedly on the beach with his small sister, while his eager brothers ranged over the Island.

It cannot be said that the great spy quest yielded very substantial results. Indeed, it was not till after they had wearied of its fruitlessness, that they stumbled upon their Great Adventure. For many days they detected the hangdog stamp of the spy upon every lounge in the fields and by the roadside, and most conspicuously upon every painter and every holiday photographer.

Big Peter exercised his diplomatic manner of address upon numberless strangers whom he wishes never to meet again—some were polite, others unaccountably rude. He stopped to inspect every sketch, and he glared at every photographer as if by sheer penetration he could see the undeveloped images upon the hidden films. But in no case did evidence appear—and Heaven knows the Boys were not exacting—which would justify an arrest, and still less a roadside courtmartial, a summary execution, and a shameful burial. “We will bury them in quicklime,” observed Tony, smacking his lips, “like they do murderers.” The whole thing was barren and most disappointing, the Boys grew weary, and days would dawn upon which Jitny was left sleeping in her shed while her masters swam in the warm waters of Colwell Bay. The watched pot never boils, and the spy that is searched for remains ever in hiding. They seemed, too, to detect a satirical flavour in Dad’s inquiry “Any sport?” which met them upon returning from a run, and their reply that sport was fine and Jitny a buzzing angel did not sound, even to themselves, as wholly convincing. At this time, they could not decide whom they disliked most—Dad or Wee Roddy—both were utterly detestable, the one for asking inconvenient questions and the other for his suspicious silence.

One morning Mother wanted to learn the times at which steamers left Yarmouth for the mainland, and the Boys were strolling in Jitny towards that stately harbour in order to find out. No thought of spies was in their minds, they were, in fact, discussing the infamous exactions of the toll-keepers at Yarmouth Bridge who charged them sixpence each way for passage. "Another expense for old man Dad," observed Big Peter. "We are a beastly expense to him," remarked Tony, thoughtfully. "A family must be a rotten thing to keep up. I shouldn't mind being married, but I'd draw the line at a lot of brats."

Big Peter laughed. "Wee Roddy's views are just the opposite," said he. "He is not going to be married, but he is going to have some children. Jane and he have decided that a boy, a girl, and a baby would be just right. They have fixed on that."

They neared the side-road, which leads up to the big fort on the cliff facing Hurst Castle. At the junction stands a tall post carrying the telephone-wire from the fort to Newport. To the top of this post clung the figure of a man who seemed to be working at the wire. They had often seen wires under repair, and even their suspicious minds were unstirred until they neared the Bridge and its abominable toll. It was just at this point that Peter remarked, "How easy it

would be for spies to tap telephone or telegraph lines in broad daylight. No one would suspect that they were not repairers. One can do anything if one has enough cheek. I heard of some people who went away on holiday and when they got back their house was stripped to the bone, not a stick of furniture left in it. Someone had come with a furniture-van and carted off the whole show. Sheer cheek. Everyone thought it was an ordinary flitting, as they say up North."

Tony pondered over the sublime opportunities open to those with ample cheek—his own equipment was not inconsiderable—and remarked that perhaps the man on the telephone-pole was a spy after all.

"No such luck!" bitterly observed Peter.

Still the idea clung to their minds and they resolved that when returning they would investigate the doings of the wire repairer.

They climbed up the hill from Yarmouth and neared the pole at the side-road leading up to the fort. The man was still at work. Just then his head was bent down and he seemed to be listening. At the foot of the pole rested a bicycle. The Boys stopped the car and watched curiously. From where they sat they had a side view of the man, and Peter noted that his hat was off and a telephone earpiece was fitted over his head. "He has cut the wire," whispered he, "and fitted the ends to the terminals of a pocket

'phone. He may be only testing the line, but I am going up to make sure."

He jumped out, opened the tool-box and drew forth a big spanner. Then he climbed quietly up the pole by the foot-rests, approaching the man from behind. When he neared the operator, who was unconscious of his presence, he held on firmly with his left hand and gripped the spanner in his right. It was a heavy tool, deadly in the quick hands of a cricketer.

"What are you doing here?" cried Big Peter.

The man started violently, looked over his shoulder, and almost involuntarily darted a hand towards his pocket.

"No," roared Peter, excited now. "Keep your hands up. I will bash your head in if you move."

For a second the man and boy eyed one another in that awkward position, and then the man said quietly:

"What do you here? I was mending the wire."

Now Peter knew German. He had taken it up as a voluntary subject "because it amused him"—surely the sole instance on record of anyone extracting amusement from the German language—and he detected instantly the throaty Teutonic consonants. His heart beat almost as fast as Jitny's engine.

“Go down,” ordered he. “Go down at once, and mind, no tricks or you’ll be dead before you know anything.”

The man paused for a moment thinking and then, suddenly, without a word, twisted round the pole and scrambled down, helter skelter.

Peter darted after him, but the man reached the ground first, seized his bicycle, ran it out into the road, and swung into the saddle. In another instant he would have been off, but Peter, who had landed heavily, jumped into the road and kicked full at the back wheel. His heavy boot went right through the spokes, and down came bicycle and man with Big Peter on the top of the heap. Before the man, who was mixed up with the bicycle, could recover, Big Peter had tackled him by the elbows and got a knee into the small of his back. “Tony,” gasped Peter, “cast off the hood-straps. Be as quick as you can!”

Trembling with joyous excitement—never had there been such a thrilling, unexpected adventure—Tony cleared the straps from the car and ran to his brother’s help. While Peter hauled the man’s elbows near to touching, Tony passed a long strap through, behind his back, wound it round two or three times and buckled together the ends. Then with Peter, who was now free, he helped to drag the captive from out of the ruins of

the bicycle. To make matters sure, they wound the second strap round the man's knees and secured it firmly. He was now as helpless as a mummy. The Boys wiped the sweat from their brows.

"Search his pockets!" commanded Peter.

From one pocket Tony produced a wire-cutter and a large scale map of the western end of the Isle of Wight, from the other he drew a Browning automatic pistol. The pure rapture of the discovery filled his youthful soul so full that he could hardly speak. He looked around. There was, unhappily, no wall, that classical background for the execution of spies, but in default there were trees in plenty.

"Peter," cried he, clutching the pistol, "there's no wall, but let us stick him up against that tree and shoot him out of hand!" Spies in stories of war were always shot out of hand.

"Drop it, you young ass!" cried Peter, seriously alarmed. "Here, give me the pistol and the other things." He recovered the deadly weapon from the reluctant grip of Tony and returned it with the wire-cutter and map to the prisoner's pockets. They were the *pièces de conviction*, and must not be disturbed. Tony was bitterly disappointed; it was hard, cruelly hard, that both a spy and the means of his execution should have fallen literally from the clouds, and that

neither should be put to their predestined use. He urged the necessities of the situation upon Big Peter, but that youth, who though in mufti, had stiffened into the sergeant of O.T.C., snubbed him with military curtness.

“Rot!” he said, sternly. “We have no right to do more than secure the spy and hand him over to a competent military authority. That will be the C.O. of yonder fort. We will take him up in the car.”

Before leaving the scene of the exploit, Peter climbed the pole again and saw that the telephone connection was hanging safely in its place with the earpieces which had torn from the man's head during his rapid descent. This, together with the broken bicycle, which they carried to the side of the road by the pole, formed useful additions to the stock of *pièces de conviction*. Then they lifted the strapped-up captive into the passenger's seat of the car and Tony got up behind, straddling over the engine-cover. It was a hot seat, but what matters a little discomfort when glory calls! Peter, before getting in, handed to Tony the big spanner. “Just whack him over the head if he tries to roll out, or interferes with me.”

Tony grasped the tool with satisfaction. “Now, you beastly German,” warned he, grimly, “just give me half a chance, and I will knock your ugly head in. Half a chance, no more.” The “beastly German” was

silent. To all inquiries, either in English or German, he returned the one stolid answer, "I was testing the wire." He said this over and over again till the Boys got heartily sick of questioning him. "Tell that to the Marines," said Peter impatiently, thus prophetically associating himself with the famous Corps in which he was destined, ere long, to become a youthful officer.

Peter started Jitny, jumped in, and ran her slowly, as befitted her solemn errand, up to the big entrance of the fort on the cliff.

A sentry was pacing before the gate. He stopped and stood to attention as the car drew up. Peter and Tony touched their caps. The sentry responded by placing his right hand on the barrel of his rifle. It was a sublime moment.

"We have here," said Big Peter, "a German spy whom we have captured in the act of tapping your telephone-wire. Please report at once to the C.O."

The sentry instantly called the guard and a corporal of Royal Garrison Artillery hurried out. To him Peter briefly explained his errand, and indicated the trussed-up captive at his side. "He is a German spy," said he. "In his pockets are a map, a wire-cutter, and a Browning pistol. I am a sergeant of O.T.C. Report at once to the C.O." The corporal asked no questions,

but departed hastily as ordered. It was a beautiful sight. Never before had they given orders to regular soldiers, and now even exalted potentates, such as commanding officers of the Royal Artillery, were at their call. A few minutes passed, the sentry remained at attention, his bayonet gleaming in the sunshine. The captive, whose physical and mental discomfort must have been unspeakable—they had strapped his elbows with ruthless tightness—remained stolidly silent.

The corporal returned, accompanied by a lieutenant in uniform. The Boys, who were in mufti and seated—oh, why had they not put on uniform for this great day?—gave him “eyes right” and raised their caps. The lieutenant saluted with punctilious care. The cup of glory was brimming over.

“The C.O. is away,” explained the lieutenant; “but I am temporarily in charge here. Please make your report to me.”

Then Peter, with military exactness, told his story, using no unnecessary words, but omitting no detail. “The telephone attachment is still on your wire,” concluded he, “and the man’s broken bicycle is near the pole. He has in his pockets a map, a wire-cutter, and an automatic pistol. The case was one of grave suspicion, so we took the responsibility of arresting the man and bringing him here.”

“And a devilish plucky thing, too,” observed the lieutenant, smiling at the eager faces of the Boys, “for two unarmed youngsters to seize an armed spy.”

“I had the heavy spanner,” said Peter modestly, “and I am pretty big myself. He is rather a worm.”

The officer scratched his head in perplexity. “It looks a clear case,” said he, “and yet I don’t understand it. If this ruffian is a spy, what was he going to do with our telephone-wire? He couldn’t sit on the top of the pole day and night on the chance of an important message passing. It doesn’t sound reasonable to me.”

“These Germans are patient swine,” explained Big Peter. “They will hang about for weeks in the hope of doing someone a dirty trick.”

“You are sure he is a German?”

“Sure. He won’t say much, but every word he speaks gives him away. I will bet my life he is German.”

The officer walked to the near side of the car and examined the prisoner, who did not look imposing. He was small and dressed in the clothes of a mechanic. His fat, bearded face was chalky with fright.

“He looks like some bally workman,” observed the lieutenant. “I hope you’ve made no mistake. It would turn out a bit costly for you. There’s the broken bicycle

and the arrest, and the moral and intellectual damage."

"What about the pistol and the map?" replied Peter. "They give him away. And the telephone attachment which is still on your wire? He is a spy all right. In any case my father would see us through. He is a bit of a sportsman."

"He ought to be with boys like you," returned the officer heartily. "This business is a bit above me. In the absence of the C.O. I can't take the responsibility of keeping your prisoner here. I will get my motor bike and come with you to Newport, where we will report the whole thing to the General. It is his show, not ours."

"What make of bike?" asked Peter eagerly.

The lieutenant informed him, and the two instantly fell to discussing the merits of this particular make in meticulous detail.

Big Peter, who knew all motor bicycles intimately, held that the clutch of this make left something to be desired, though the engine and the variable gear were nearly perfect. The owner, of course, upheld the surpassing perfections of his machine down to the smallest detail. They might have spent a delightful morning in this technical discussion—the dearest of all to the hearts of motor cyclists—if the officer had not remembered the prisoner.

"I will get my bike," said he, "and hand

over the fort to my junior sub. You will see that the jigger, clutch and all, will run away from your old bus."

"Of course a solo bike——" began Peter, but the officer had gone.

When he returned a procession was formed, and they set out for Newport. First went the lieutenant, scorching as one bent upon displaying the capacities of his mount; then followed Jitny with the Boys and their prisoner, striving gallantly, even with this heavy load, to make up on the leader; far behind came a file of artillery-men bound for the telephone-pole, there to mount guard over the *pièces de conviction*. They reached Newport in what Tony called "no time"; it was actually thirty-five minutes of reckless bumping over rough roads. Tony more than once nearly pitched off his precarious seat, which grew unbearably hot beneath him, and the prisoner, whose weight was chiefly borne upon his bound elbows, must have suffered the tortures of the damned. But no one inquired about his feelings. When they reached the great gates of Carisbrooke Castle the lieutenant—who had arrived five minutes earlier—gleefully greeted them with "I knew she couldn't keep up with my bike!"

"I didn't suppose that she could. But if you had bought a —— instead of that clutch-slipping crock, you'd have got here at an average of forty."

The lieutenant, who fortunately remembered that he was on duty, sent in a polite message to the General, and they waited for him outside the gates. The lieutenant was so kind as to say that Jitny went faster than he had expected, and Big Peter, mollified, got out, took off her engine-cover—Tony was vastly thankful to remove himself; his trousers, he declared, were burnt through—and displayed her engine to the deeply interested gaze of the officer. When at length the General came out his surprised eyes fell upon a small, low, squat car containing a mummy-like bound figure, and partially obscured by three pairs of legs. The heads of their owners were buried deep in Jitny's vitals.

"What is all this?" he cried sharply.

The lieutenant, blushing, sprang to attention, and the Boys, removing their caps, ranged upon either side.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the officer humbly. "It was my fault. These youngsters have captured this man, whom they declare is a German spy, and I took the liberty of bringing him and them over to you."

"German spy!" snorted the General contemptuously. "I am sick of this spy talk."

The lieutenant kicked Peter with violence, and that big youth, taking the hint, burst at once into his story. He told it well, quietly, exaggerating nothing, but omitting

no detail. When he had finished the General questioned him closely, and then, his air of contemptuous disbelief wholly gone, tried to draw an explanation from the prisoner. But in vain. That cautious man, having heard Peter say that every word betrayed his origin, sat resolutely silent.

"Well," at last said the General, "this looks a genuine case. The first that I've heard of, by the way. I get about fifty letters a day warning me that the Island population chiefly consists of German spies, but I've never seen one yet. Except, perhaps, this one. Now the question arises, what shall we do with him?" He scratched his chin and surveyed the Boys.

"If you please, sir," put in Tony eagerly, "you have lots of beautiful walls here, and we could easily fix up a firing party. My brother is a marksman, and I have done a good bit of Morris tube."

The General gasped, stared hard at the anxiously expectant face of the boy, decided that he was not being chaffed—as a bachelor he was suspicious of all boys—and laughed kindly.

"I really wish we could adopt your excellent suggestion," said he. "It would save everybody a world of trouble. But it might excite comment. The English people are a soft lot, my lad. But it is a very excellent idea." He laughed again at the gratified

face of Tony. The commendation of the exalted officer almost compensated in his mind for the loss of an ardently desired execution.

"We cannot deal with this man as a military matter," at last declared the General. "We are supposed to be at peace with these German hogs—worse luck—and I can't keep him here. He would apply for a writ of *habeas corpus* or some such rot."

"Frightful rot, sir," murmured the lieutenant sympathetically.

"We must hand him over to the civil authority for trial, under the Official Secrets Act. That means the police-station at Newport. If you will wait a moment I will order out my car and we will go down there at once."

A few minutes later a remarkable procession might have been seen winding through the old streets of that town. First came the lieutenant on his motor bicycle, no longer scorching; then followed Jitny, driven by Big Peter with his prisoner beside him and Tony perched up behind. The kind-hearted General had left the Boys in charge of their captive. After Jitny came a big red, open landaulet driven by a chauffeur and containing the General in field uniform; after this car rode two soldiers with drawn swords. It was a glorious spectacle which the Boys, from their advanced position, could un-

happily not see. But the population of Newport thoroughly enjoyed the gallant sight. By some mysterious telepathic current, the news had spread that a German spy was being taken to the police-station, and at every corner a crowd gathered to shout their joy. The General frowned, but the Boys glowed with pride. The prisoner was theirs and they were the centre of interest. While Peter drove carefully, his young face sternly set, Tony behind waved his big spanner, and indicated to the crowd that he awaited only the least excuse to bash in the prisoner's head. The crowd, no less than Tony, longed that the excuse might be offered.

All too soon the police-station was reached, and the civil arm removed the prisoner from Jitny and bore him to the cool recesses of a cell. Tony, a careful soul, demanded the return of the hood-straps. "We want the straps," he explained. "You can put the beast in irons if he turns violent." So the straps were given up, and then the scene changed. Peter gave his name and address, dictated to an Inspector an account of the capture, signed it, shook hands with the General—who beamed upon the Boys like some long-lost bachelor uncle—and all was over. At one bump they fell out of the world of romance, the streets were empty, the sun still shone, but seemed to have gone cold;

Jitny no longer a Car of Destiny, had become a mere vehicle.

Accompanied by their new friend the lieutenant, they ran back to Colwell Bay, Tony being allowed to drive as a great treat. The officer sat beside him, critical of Jitny's paces. Peter bestrode the lieutenant's motor bicycle. It was his invariable custom to annex other people's mounts on the briefest acquaintance. The Boys prevailed upon their companion to come in to lunch, and the whole glorious story was poured into the ears of Mother, Dad, Wee Roddy, and Little Jane.

"It was one of the pluckiest things I have ever known," commented the lieutenant. "The fellow is evidently a dangerous spy, and his Browning pistol had seven shots in it. Yet your sons, sir, took him with their bare hands"—considerately he omitted mention of the big spanner. "You must be proud of them, sir!"

"I am," said Dad.

Mother gazed fondly at the bright, sun-burned face of the young officer, and wondered if he would mind very much if she kissed him. The Boys lustily smote him on the back. By this time he had become their trusty pal.

* * * * *

The strangest part of this story remains to be told. From that day to this, from the

day on which they had seen the police-station at Newport swallow up their victim, the Boys have had no word of him. Not one solitary word. The plain brick-built station might have been a Bastille and the cell an *oubliette*. The Boys had their little day of golden glory and then fell into black, impenetrable silence. All their efforts to pierce the veil of secrecy were vain. Many times they visited the Bastille at Newport, but the wooden faces of the officials there were as blank as their own whitewashed walls. Spy, spy, what spy? They would not even admit that they had ever received one into their sanctuary. Many times, too, the Boys sought out their new friend, the Artillery Lieutenant, borrowed and damaged his motor bicycle, taught him to drive Jitny, jeered at his inability to match their own high skill, and in other companionable ways sought to convey their approval of him as man and brother. But between their thirst for news of the spy and his knowledge, stood an unscalable wall of military discipline. "I can't tell you, boys; it is against orders." And in the face of Orders they were stricken with dumbness. Orders to them were as sacred as to him. At last, greatly daring, they journeyed to Carisbrooke and called upon the General. It was an act of hardihood, they trembled mightily at the doing of it, but their terrors were swept away by the great man's charming

courtesy. He opened his arms to them, showed them over the private rooms of the Castle, and entertained them to a most handsome tea. We feel sure that the General must once have been a boy himself. He talked to them frankly of many things, of the long, dull round of peace, and of the dazzling delights of war—as he, poor man, conceived them — especially against those “German sweeps.” “War will come soon,” he declared, “and you young fellows will be in it up to the neck. It will be the biggest thing the world has ever seen, but where shall I be? Stuck away in some nursery job like this. Damn!” He talked of everything except of the great subject, and might have been trained as a diplomat instead of as a soldier—“a silly old ass of a soldier,” as he dejectedly put it, “too old to fight and of no use except for fighting. Don’t either of you ever become an old soldier, my boys; get yourselves killed young or retire early.” Whenever they boldly edged in a word about their elusive spy he would say, “Ah yes, just so, just so. You’re smart boys, very smart. Nice little car that of yours. Run it by yourselves, too; great fun! Come and see mine—” and so time and again with some simple evasion he would put them off their quest. “Bring your mother and father to see me, bring your brothers and sisters, bring anyone you please. You are nice boys, quite little men!”—Big

Peter's shoulders were about on a level with his bald pate—"plucky boys, too; I like you. Come again soon."

So he dismissed them, deeply gratified but completely baffled by his artful simplicity. The three avenues of information were all closed; at the end of each Someone's Orders were plainly written. The broken bicycle had gone from its place at the foot of the pole, and the telephone-wire had been mended. No trace remained either of the Adventure or of the Spy.

All offered explanations after their kind. Big Peter decided that in our sloppy, soft English way, fearful of offending beastly foreigners, the spy had been released. "They can be as thick as ants for me," he said, "I shan't bother to catch any more." Tony was convinced that at some chill, damp dawn—a filthy time to be shot—behind the prison, or in the Castle yard, the German had been polished off and afterwards tucked away warmly in quicklime, "like they do murderers." Wee Roddy adopted the unpopular view that the man was not a spy at all. "I expect," observed that uncanny child, "he was a Post Office man. I am sure the Post Office uses lots of Germans because they are cheap." Dad decided in his own deep mind that the Home Office was somewhere holding the fellow secretly secure, law-breaking in the interests of public safety, and anticipating

the hour of war when the amplest powers of seclusion would be allowed. Mother remarked harshly that anyone who would try to shoot little Peter, dear, harmless fellow—"Oh, Mother, Mother, what about that big spanner!"—deserved and had received all the tortures that the brain of devils could devise.

So the conjectures ran, but of enlightening facts there were none, and the House was left sitting.

CHAPTER V

AN ECHO OF THE PAST

IT was one morning towards the end of August, and two full days only remained to them of their stay in the Island. "Two days," said Peter, "and one of them we must give up to the overhaul of the Bus for her long run North. To-morrow I want to go over to our old Farm in the New Forest. I haven't been there for years and years."

"Six years," put in Dad, whose exact memory for dates was often a sore trial to his womenfolk. "We last stayed there in 1907. You were just four when we first discovered the Farm, and we stayed five times."

"Bonchurch and the Farm in the New Forest," gravely remarked Big Peter, "were my twin ideals of Paradise when I was a kid. I want to revisit both those scenes of my vanished youth. Old-age is fast approaching."

"The barge from Yarmouth to Lymington costs five shillings each way," regretfully observed Tony.

"Dad can't possibly run to it," said Wee Roddy with emphasis. "Ten shillings are a frightful lot of money."

"Oh, Dad has pots," cheerfully declared Little Jane. "He paid my pocket-money twice last week, tuppence each time. Silly old man Dad."

"Sh!!" reproved Mother. "It is your fault, Peter. You shouldn't say such things before the children."

"Roddy," said Dad, "I have always maintained that you would become a Great Man, but I regret to detect in you those pernicious qualities which go to the making of a Millionaire. Struggle against them, my son, beat them down with energy. You cannot combine Greatness and Money-Making. Spend, therefore, cheerfully, and heed not the future. For after all, what are ten shillings?"

"A frightful lot of money," replied Roddy gravely. "You can't afford it. Mother won't let you."

"My dear," said Dad, "there is, it appears, a dark conspiracy between you and Roddy to save me from a lighthearted bankruptcy. This makes a painful situation for me. What shall I do?"

"Let the Boys go," cried Mother. "They don't get much fun, poor things."

"Woman, woman," groaned Dad, "you frowned upon my purchase of the car, which cost a mere ninety pounds, and now you would chuck ten whole shillings into the sea. Where is your consistency?"

"The poor things want to go."

“So the poor hardly-used darlings, who don’t get much fun, only every blessed thing the mind of boy could desire, must deprive me of my car for a whole day, wear out my tyres, and force me into the awful chasm of utter financial ruin. Well, well, have your own way, woman. What, I repeat, are ten shillings? Let us go down to the beach and play ducks and drakes with bright new sovereigns. They jump better than stones, and will amuse the Boys, who don’t get much fun, poor things.”

“So that is settled,” said Peter with satisfaction. “I will say that, as parents, you two are quite decent people.”

Dad rose to his feet. “In my wife’s name and my own, sir, I thank you for this expression of your most kind appreciation. It is sufficient honour for us, sir, to endeavour to merit your generous approbation. And in thanking you for your favours in the past, sir, we respectfully solicit a continuance of the same.”

He resumed his seat.

“Dad really is a silly old man, isn’t he, Peter?” whispered Little Jane.

“Be careful, Boys, when you get to the Farm,” said Mother. “I don’t know whether the old Farmer is still alive. I have not heard of him for three or four years, and he was very old then.”

“Let me see,” commented Dad, the sta-

tistician. "When we first went down, thirteen years ago—you were a long-legged brat of four, Peter—the Farmer was over seventy. He must be well on towards eighty-five by now. I expect he is alive all right, eighty-five is only middle-age in a farmer. My forbears farmed their own land for centuries, and not one died under ninety. Farmers never do the kind of work which kills, always get heaps of fresh air, sport, and the best of everything, and grumble continuously at their hard lot in life. Health, prosperity, and plausible excuses for endless complaints against Providence, tend to extreme longevity. I have made up my mind. At the earliest possible date I will give up my job in the cold, forbidding North and set up a cottage with a dozen acres of land on the Hampshire coast. I see the very spot, it is on the Beaulieu estate. The thing is settled, I have said it."

"But where is the money to come from?" objected Mother. "You never save any."

"I wonder," said Dad, ruefully scratching his head.

"You see, Dad," remarked Wee Roddy, "there is some use in not spending money. I shall save all mine."

Dad groaned. "I see, Roddy, that no effort of mine will keep you from becoming a Millionaire. It is a fearful thought."

"But when I am a Millionaire," explained

Roddy serenely, "I will buy you the farm in Hampshire, the cottage and the twelve acres, so you will be all right, though you don't save yourself."

"Hurrah!" shouted Dad, turning in his baffling way a complete mental summersault. "I remove all objections. You shall become a Millionaire as soon as you like, and the quicker the better. How long do you think you will be about it?" he inquired anxiously. "I am sick to death of the North, and am just dying for that Hampshire cottage. I shall keep fowls, Buff Wyandottes, and pigs—Berkshires. Jolly beasts Berkshire pigs, one fats them up to about seven stone and then turns them into sausages. I will have cows, Red Devons, red as their own native soil. Then I will have roses, lots of roses; chrysanthemums, the big show sorts such as I used to grow, and apple-trees. We will have an apple a day and keep the doctor away—that will be a great saving, especially in our old age. Do you think you will take long over the millionaire business, Roddy?"

"Not long," solemnly replied that small youth. "I will begin as soon as I leave school. Don't you worry, Dad, leave it all to me."

"So that's settled," said Dad, with an air of relief. "My future is assured. Wee Roddy has said it."

“How can you be so absurd!” said Mother, “putting such ideas into the boy’s head!”

“Not a bit of it. I didn’t put them there. They are the fruit of his unaided genius. You will see that friend Roddy will keep his word to the letter. It is a pity, though, that he is so young. His age puts my cottage and the twelve acres rather a long way off. Could you, my blessed infant, by taking thought grow up with lightning speed?”

“I will try,” replied Roddy seriously.

At half-past seven on the following morning Big Peter and Tony arrived at Yarmouth, and embarked themselves and Jitny on the great square, flat-bottomed barge that was to take them to Lymington. They were accompanied by another barge crammed so closely with pigs, that men walked to and fro upon their backs. Busy with Indian corn which had been thrown on the floor of the barge, the pigs took not the slightest notice of the passing burden. Upon the Boys’ barge the only other car was a big top-heavy limousine, and when they emerged from shelter into the busy waves of the Solent—a strong south-westerly sea was running—the limousine rocked alarmingly on its springs and looked like departing over the low sides of the barge with one glorious splash. The Boys were deeply concerned, and conferred anxiously with the chauffeur in charge. That philosopher did not share their apprehensions;

he lighted his pipe with some difficulty in the breeze, turned his back indifferently upon his rocking car, and calmly observed: "A good thing if she went, too. She is a cantankerous beast. Five years old, does a bare ten miles to the gallon, and takes two hours and a half to clean every night. The railway company is responsible, not me. I would like fine to see the last of her."

But he was disappointed, for the railway servants knew their business. The limousine might rock as she pleased, but departure into the deep was not permitted. Lymington was safely reached, the Boys bade farewell to the grumbling chauffeur—still reluctantly tied to his cantankerous beast—rushed Jitny up the green, slimy cobbles of the landing-stage, and sped away for the Farm of their childhood. They had already paid one bridge toll to get into Yarmouth, and were faced by yet another to get out of Lymington. "It is a good thing Roddy is not here," observed Tony. "These tolls would break his heart."

Presently they emerged upon the wide, open heather-clad moor which runs by Boldre up to the white gates of Beaulieu, and disgustedly surveyed the road. The long drought had changed the fine, smooth, gravel surface into a broken, stony track, as resistant to their progress as the seashore itself. The way stretched before them clear for miles, it called for a tingling rush through the bright

morning air, but permitted of no more than a lugubrious crawl. "Nothing ever is as it ought to be," groaned Tony, who was driving. "Not a police-trap or a corner, or a hedge, and I can't get more than five miles an hour out of her." It was just a case of stolid plugging up to the Beaulieu boundary, but then the road became hard and well-kept—for was not the lord of that lovely domain a famous motorist?—and Tony thrilled to the rush down to the village. The tide was up. On one side of the road stretched wide, glittering tree-girt waters, on the other slept in the sunshine the grey stones of the Abbey. If there is a more beautiful sight in the fair English land than Beaulieu on a summer morning when the tide is in, we have yet to find it. The old monks knew what they were doing when they annexed Beaulieu to the lands of the Church, and Henry, when he tore it from them, added the fairest jewel to the Crown of England. As its owner once said to us, "It is just a lovely picture spread out on the ground. There is no money in it, but then there is no money in pictures when you put them on a wall. Only sheer delight. There are better things in this world than money."

"Pretty place," said Peter, and stayed not the car. Had Roddy been there—that queer compost of artistic sense, worldly wisdom, and money-grubbing—he would have wished

to stop and to pass a happy hour in absorbed contemplation. After all, we do not believe that Wee Roddy will ever become a millionaire. We have known him to stand out in the rain to watch the light gild the edges of broken clouds, and these things consort not with the pursuit of wealth.

"In Beaulieu Woods, over there beyond the water," said Peter, "we had a picnic-lunch years ago. You, Tony, were discovered lapping up cider at a fearful rate, and when the glass was taken away you crawled about after it with tongue hanging out for more."

"I remember," cried Tony, keen to cap his elder brother's recollection. "I liked the sting of the cider on my tongue."

"Rubbish, you were only two. You cannot possibly remember."

"Of course I do," indignantly protested Tony. "You are not the only person who can recollect things."

They passed on up the ascent of Hilltop, and emerged from the Beaulieu domain upon the much-crumbled roads of the Heath. Once more progress became a crawl, but the way was not long, and every mile brought them near to the magic district of their dreams.

"Ah!" cried Tony. "I know now where we are; that is——"

"Blackdown," said Peter.

“ Yes, yes, and there among the trees——”

“ The chimneys of our Farm.” It was a gorgeous moment.

Into the farmyard they swept with much panting of engine and tooting of the horn, and came to a halt at the house-gate, the sight of which took them back six years at one bound. Tony eagerly surveyed the Farm.

“ What has come to it ?” he exclaimed, puzzled wonder on his face. “ I remember a great palace, and now it is only a house. Can this really be our Farm ? It is so much smaller than it used to be.”

“ It is we that are bigger,” replied Peter soberly. To him also the shrinkage of fact in comparison with dazzling recollection had brought a sense of shock. Where was the farmyard with its vast buildings and spacious entrances, where the expanse of fields stretching unbroken to the far horizon, where the towering trees which formerly had touched the sky ? His eyes seemed to have become diminishing lenses.

“ I am almost sorry we came,” he observed rather sadly. “ I liked the Farm better as it was.”

“ I’m not,” cried Tony. “ This is great. Everything is smaller but still exactly the same now I come to look ; just like a reduced photograph. It is all frightfully interesting.”

The door of the house opened, and a woman stood gazing at them as they marched up

the path. They knew her at once, small and shrunken though she seemed to be, but she looked upon them without recognition. They were, you see, in Lilliput and she in Brobdignag.

"Don't you know us?" cried Peter, holding out his hands.

"I ought to," she replied, staring. "You look familiar somehow. You're not, you're not, you're surely not——"

"Little Peter and Tony grown big," cried he.

"Oh, you dears!" she screamed. "You great splendid boys! To think of it!" She jumped at them, and before she well knew what was happening they had fallen upon her, kissed her with emphasis, borne her within the house, and set her down blushing, laughing, on the edge of tears.

"Oh, you terrible boys," she gasped, both hands on her rumpled hair. "And you, Peter, almost a man! I'm shamed by such goings on."

But, middle-aged spinster though she was, she did not look ashamed. Her eyes were glowing, her cheeks flamed red under their kisses, youth had for a moment returned to her.

"Father," she cried, "Father, come quick. It's little Peter and Tony grown big."

"So that's all right," whispered Tony. "He's not dead."

There was a clatter of sticks on the hard floor, and their old friend, bowed double with rheumatism, hobbling painfully, but bright, cheerful, unchanged in face, ever young in spite of the load of years, appeared before them. Him they also swept down upon, the two sticks flew clattering against the walls, and in their place, on either hand, stood the Boys supporting the old man.

"Oh, you be girt boys," cried the old Farmer, his excited tongue reverting to the pleasant Devon speech of his youth; "and I be main glad to see 'ee. Now steady, boys. I bain't very sure of my feet. Take time to it and help me back to my chair. Ah, that be fine, you be strong, you be. Peter now, here, such a giant he be growed. Why, he could carry me, he could, like a babby, he be growed that strong."

"I could," said Peter, "and I will." And stooping down, the powerful youth swept the old man's light figure up in his great arms, bore him to his room, and gently replaced him in his big chair.

The Farmer chuckled for some moments; his delight was too deep for words.

"He carried me in, he did, just like a babby, and put me down here, he did, and me old enough to be his greatgrandfer. What a boy it be! Look to un, Bessie, look to the broad back of un, and the girt shoulders. A very giant. Picked me up,

he did, just like a babby. How old may you be, Peter boy?"

"Seventeen," replied that big youth.

"You might be twenty for the looks of you and the bigness and the tur'ble strength. Seventeen. Let me see, you was four years old when you first come here, I mind. You had long bare legs and sandals to your feet. I didn't hold with they sandals and no stockings, sore on the poor feet I says, and so I tells your lady mother. But she says they let the feet grow natural, not cramped like in boots. She was main right by the looks of you, Peter, just tell her that soon as you get back. And now I be forgetting my manners. How be your lady mother and your good father?"

"Oh, they're fine," said Peter. "They sent you their love and heaps of messages. To you, too, Miss Bessie."

"That was kind of them. They was always kind and so simple, too. Not proud like some gentry. They took their meat with me and Bessie, just as if they'd been our friends. Never made no fuss, but just took what was going."

"I should jolly well think they did," cried Peter. "You were always a ripper for splendid meals. I used to eat myself speechless."

"Me, too," observed Tony, who felt himself neglected.

"And now Tony there," went on the delighted old man. "Let me see. He were a year old, maybe, when you first comed to the Farm?"

"Fifteen months," said Tony promptly. "Peter is only two years and nine months older than me. Not three years by a good bit."

"Fifteen months. So you were. You had white hair all in curls on your head. Oh, I mind how I got myself well scolded by your lady mother. I carried you into the garden and you ate raw tomatoes, heaps of them, and your lady mother caughted us. My, wasn't there a fine showing up! You with a tomato in your hand and me carrying you. I caught it grand. But I were right that time, the good fruit didn't hurt you."

Tony longed to say that he remembered the incident, but Peter's stern eye was upon him.

"And after that you mixed up my pegs. That was a hurly burly, that was. They was all in styes according to age and size, and you opened the doors and mixed them all up. It took us hours and hours to sort out they pegs after you'd done. You was a terror."

"I remember," cried Tony, delighted. "I remember the pigs."

"Father," put in his daughter, "that was a year or two later. Not when Tony was fifteen months old."

"Never you heed, my girl," snapped the old man. "You just let me bide. I mind everything fine just as if it were yesterday. Then the presents you boys had. There was a birthday down here once, yours, Peter, and a great toy moty car came down what you sat on and waggled your feet and it ran along the road. You wanted me to get in and have a ride, an old man like me! Your mother and father used to spoil you boys something cruel."

"They do still," said Peter.

"They would," said the old man. "They was like that always. Nothing was too good for you. And your nurse, too, she spoiled you. A fine set-up maid with red hair. She always comed year after year. You won't be wanting a nurse now?"

"Not exactly," agreed Peter, laughing. "Our old Nannie stayed with us for twelve years and then got married."

"Such people for tearing about was your father and mother. Always together, like lovers they was, and always on they bicycles. They knew the Forest better'n me or Bessie. One evemin' they come in and say they'd been to Salisbury and back that day. To Salisbury and back, over fifty miles! I could believe a lot of them and they bicycles but not thicky there. Salisbury and back! But I minded my manners, and pretended they'd been, and asked about the city, and they told

me heaps just as if they'd really been there. They must have read it up, they were that knowing."

"Fifty miles is not much," observed Tony. "I have ridden more than fifty miles in a day."

"You have? And you no bigger than your lady mother?"

"I'm an inch taller than Mother," declared Tony with emphasis.

"Maybe, she was a bit of a maid. But good, boys, good all through. The Almighty don't heed the size of the passles when he puts up the best of un. Fifty miles! Well, p'raps I was wrong, and they did go to Salisbury and back, like they said. Though how they could sit on they scraps of hard leather saddles for fifty miles fair beats me. A woman, too, with her tender skin, on a saddle like thicky."

"Father!" murmured Bessie reprovingly.

"Well, warn't she a woman?" cried the old man sharply. "Her man thought she were, and the boys look as if he were right. And her skin was white and tender like the satin on Bessie's drawring-room chairs. And her to sit on a bit of hard leather, no bigger'n my hand, for fifty miles! I can't fair believe it."

Peter deftly steered the Farmer off this delicate topic. "What else did they do?" he asked.

“They were always after summat. Such a boy and maid for tearing about. When they warn’t on their bicycles they would be all over the Farm, your father asking questions all the time. He wanted to know everything; what the crops cost to grow, what prices they fetched, what the rent was, what wages the men got, what was the ‘yield per acre,’ as he called it, how much we made on pegs and bastes, what was our ‘system of accounts.’ Do you mind the ‘system of accounts,’ Bessie?”

“I do,” said she. “He went over my dairy books, said they were not a bit of use, and tried to teach me double entry.”

“Double entry, that was it,” laughed the old man. “You put everything down twice and then add it all wrong. He showed us once like that at supper. Warn’t he savage just when it didn’t come out right! I says that I hadn’t no use for a system of accounts. We never spent a penny more’n we could help, and accounts couldn’t make us spend less. If they’d have raised the price of pegs and bastes I’d have liked them fine, but your father couldn’t say they would. I says we pays into the bank what we gets, and we draws out what we spend, and the balance shows where we be. Them’s all the accounts I want. But your father was rare company, boys, he and me cottoned fine together.”

“Dad has an inquiring mind,” said Peter,

smiling. "He always pumps those he meets about their own business. He says that everybody can be interesting when he talks of what he really knows, whether it's farming or blacking boots. While they talk he just listens and soaks it all in, and they are as pleased as Punch and say he's rare company. Oh, Dad is a downy old bird, a grand listener."

"Roddy is just such another," said Tony.

"Roddy, who's Roddy?" cried the old man. "I don't mind no Roddy."

"You know, Father," explained Bessie. "He was number three; he was about four years old the last time they stayed here."

"No," said the old man obstinately, "I don't mind him at all. I only mind Peter and Tony here."

"Roddy was a queer little soul," went on Bessie. "He drawled in his talk, and didn't talk much, but he was always thinking. And he was as sharp as any needle. Nothing satisfied him without the reason of it, and he caught one up like a lawyer. 'Why are those bastes over there called cows?' he asked me one day. 'That's their name,' I said. 'But why cows? Why are pegs called pegs, and harses called harses, and cows called cows?' He took up the pronunciation from the men, you see. I said they were their names—just as he was called Roddy they were called cows. But he wasn't a bit satisfied. 'Where did they get their

names? Mummy called me Roddy when I was born, but who first called the cows cows?' I said that Adam gave the animals their names in the Garden of Eden. 'Oh,' he said, and thought it out for a bit. Then he drawled out in his dear little voice: 'But that wasn't here, that was in the Garden of Eden. Mother says that was a long ways off, not in England. Who first called the cows cows in England?' Then I gave up."

"That's just like Roddy is now," said Peter, "only more so. He's perfectly awful."

"Boys," said the old Farmer, above whose head this talk had passed unheeded. "Would you call me old like?"

"Old?" cried Peter. "Not a bit of it. You are just the same as when we came here first. You look smaller because we are bigger, but you're just the same, not a day older."

"So I says to Bessie," chuckled the pleased old man, "when she calls me old. You heed what Peter says, girl. The Almighty have give me up as a bad job, I be too tough for un. But for the rheumatics in my legs and my sore feet, I be as spry as ever I were. I hears and I sees and I eats, good as ever. If I could walk I would come out with you, boys, like I did years ago."

"Never mind the rheumatics and your sore feet," exclaimed Peter, struck by a brilliant thought. "You shall come out with us—in our car."

“What, me? In a moty car?” The old man bubbled with mirth. “And you boys too?”

“Both of us,” said Tony. “Peter shall drive and I will sit up behind. We will give you the time of your life.”

“Do you really think it safe for him?” anxiously inquired Bessie. “He’s near eighty-five and has never been in a motor.”

“Bessie,” cried the old man, “you chatter too much. Let me bide. The boys have druv their car all the way here. They knows what’s vit and proper for us folk. I’ll have my dinner and then I’ll go with Peter and Tony in their moty car. Nothing shan’t stop me. Nobody, leastwise you, shall say that I be old. I sees, I hears, and I eats as good as ever. But for my rheumatics and my sore feet I’d be like a boy. If you says any more, Bessie, I will get Peter to let me druv the car myself.”

The midday dinner at the Farm was a sumptuous meal, Miss Bessie had seen to that, and at its close a pyramid of crimson tomatoes was placed before Tony, in memory of infant days, while to Peter’s share fell a wide bowl, as big as a wash-basin, of fresh pink raspberries.

“Good effort!” cried the Boys. “This is some kind of a meal!”

While seated at table the Boys told of their great Spy Adventure, and the old man rejoiced.

“ You be fearsome boys,” cried he. “ So you bruk un’s bicycle, strapped un up, and cast un into prison. It be like the Scriptures. And you don’t know what become of un after that ?”

They explained the family’s conjectures and the total absence of news.

“ I expect your Dad is main right, boys. Let me see. I hold with him that the Prooshian Spy is now rotting in the deepest dungeon of the Keep at Carisbrooke. Just rotting like a medlar. They’s tur’ble places, them dungeons, full of crawly vermin, rats, and töads. Grand places for spies.” He smacked his lips.

“ Oh, do you think so ?” cried Tony. “ That would be better than shooting. More lingering and creepy.”

“ That’s where he bides, down in them fearsome dungeons,” went on the old Farmer, his imagination kindling. “ They give un bread and water, maybe, but naught else. All among the slimy töads; I never could abide they bastes. Down to Demshur we calls our children little töads, playful like, but we fears they bastes tur’ble. There be pixies to un. The General, he talked of a war, did he? That’s no bad news for the likes of us, wars is good for prices. I will tell young David ” (his grey-haired son) “ he might store all the corn in the barn

and hold back the wool. Prices be great in war-time. Did I ever tell on to you boys how I heered the guns which sunk the pirate ship, the *Alabama*, fifty years ago? It was the nineteenth of June, 1864. I was on a hill over to Barnstaple in North Demshur, and the battle was fought off Cherbourg in France. Yet I heard the guns."

"Impossible!" said Peter, who was not wholly ignorant of geography.

"I did sure," said the delighted old man. "You bide fast till I tell you on it. It was a fine June morn, a Sunday. I had Mr. Yeo's farm then, over to Barnstable. My missus, Bessie's mother, was ailing-like. It was just before you was born, Bessie."

"Oh, no," cried poor Bessie, aghast at the terrible accuracy of dates. "It was long before my time. It must have been Minnie, not me."

"Maybe. There was a fair heap of you, one after the other, like sheep jumping through a gate. Maybe it wasn't you that time. My missus warn't up to going to church so I stayed away, too, and took a walk before dinner. There was one or two lads about, and I walked with they up Black Hill. There we sat down where we could see the Bay. It was a fine season that year, hay good and heavy, corn heavy too, but looking a bit short in the straw. We was sitting

there quiet, not talking—us farm-folk don't be always jabbering like they do in towns. We bides our peace. I was looking over Barnstaple Bay, thinking how quiet it were and how nice the cool breeze were to my back, when I heard behind me a soft sort of thud, thud, thud, thud, just like that. I turned me round and listened, and the far-away, soft sound come again, thud, thud, thud, thud. It was very soft but quite clear. I can't exactly explain what it was like, but it were as if someone were beating a carpet slowly in a deep cellar. The lads with me heard the sound too, and one of them said it was guns to Plymouth, but that couldn't be, for the wind was set the wrong way. The sound comed more from Exeter way. Well, I went home to dinner and told them of the thuds, and they all wondered what they could be. It warn't till the Saturday after that I read in the paper that there had been a battle on that Sunday morn off Cherbourg in France, and that the pirate ship *Alabama*, what sunk so many ships, had been sunk herself by the 'Merican vessel *Kearsage*. And then I knew that the thuds I'd heard so far away were the guns firing in the battle. There, Peter boy, what do you think of that there?"

"Wonderful!" cried Peter. "What was the distance?"

"Your Dad figured it out on a map when I told him the story, and he made it out to be a hundred and fifty mile from the *Alabama*, off Cherbourg, to me on Black Hill over to Barnstaple. A powerful long way. But however far it were I heard they guns, that's sure. Thud, thud, thud, thud, just like that."

"Now," said the old man, the meal being then over, "I will go and change my clothes for to go out with you boys in the moty car. Just you lend me a hand, Bessie my girl, and I will get upstairs. I must be fine and smart for the like of this trip."

"Don't you trouble, sir," said Peter. "Your clothes are quite all right. Come as you are, won't you?"

"You be young, Peter boy, and I be oldish—not old yet by a good while—but oldish. I knows what's vit and proper to go out in a moty car with the gentry. Bessie, get out my Sunday clothes. They've been put away since I couldn't get to the church, but they bain't detoriated. Get un out, girl, and be quick about it."

The Boys went out to get Jitny ready, and after a while the old Farmer, hobbling on his two sticks, appeared clad as if for a wedding or a funeral. He was in black Sunday clothes, a stiff white collar gripped his throat, and a square, hard felt hat was

wedged over his eyes. A less fit and proper costume for a car could not have been conceived.

His bright, cheerful face fell when he beheld Jitny. "She be main small," said he. "I reckon I be too heavy for un."

"She could carry half a dozen of you," protested Tony with indignation. "The Bus is not very big, but as you said of Mother she's good all through."

"But how be I to get in?" grumbled the old man querulously, disappointment written deeply on his drooping lips.

"Stand clear, Tony," cried Peter, and again that big youth picked up the Farmer in his arms, bore him "like a babby" to the car, and deposited him in the passenger's seat. Then he started the engine and took his own place, while Tony climbed up behind.

"Now, sir," said Peter, "if you feel nervous, cling to the seat, but on no account clutch at me. That would be dangerous."

"I bain't skeered," muttered the poor old man, his face gone sickly yellow under the brown tan, in spite of his high courage. "I be a bit strange-like, that be all. The seat is main comformable."

Big Peter drove slowly out of the farm-yard and along the road towards Hythe, where the surface was less broken than on the Heath.

"Are you all right, sir?" asked he, after a few minutes.

"I be getting used to un, boy. You do drive un beautiful. So smooth and quick, a fair marvel."

The road improved and Peter allowed Jitny to slip along a little faster. The motion stirred the old man's chill blood, and his blue eyes lost their glassy look. He was now sitting up instead of lying huddled in his corner.

"This be real grand!" cried the old man, after a mile or two had been passed. "It fair beats flying, and horseflesh can't do naught like it. You be going like the wind, eh, Peter boy?"

Big Peter laughed. "This is nothing," said he. "We haven't begun to move yet."

"Be that so? Wunnerful things, moty cars. I bain't skeered no more. Could you go quicker now, what you'd call fast? though this seems like lightning to me."

"All right," said Peter. "I will take the next hill fast. Get ready, hold tight, and don't be nervous. It's perfectly safe."

Jitny ran quietly down a slight slope and then Peter opened her out. Away she leapt, rejoicing in her new-found freedom; up the easy hill she flew with a deep-throated roar

of the exhaust, on and up and then stretched out with whirring wheels upon the long, hard trail which her brave soul loves. In a moment the old man's hat was gone—happily caught by Tony, who from behind crammed his own cap upon the Farmer's scanty locks. He rolled dizzily in his place, but only for a moment. As the speed gathered, his back stiffened, his crippled frame cast off the bonds of rheumatism, he laughed, shrill, jerky cacklings; from his throat, too, came strange, weird calls, the hunting cries of a forgotten generation; he beat with his stick upon the floor. Peter, alarmed, checked Jitny, but the old man called lustily upon him to hasten, to give her the spur, to keep her head to the fences, not to lose sight of the pack—"Forrard, forrard, forrard, yoicks, hark away, hark away, hark away!" He was drunk with the wine of speed. Presently he grew more quiet, muttering and chuckling happily to himself, arousing only to storm at Peter if the speed of the car sensibly diminished. When Jitny slowed down on a hill he was bitterly resentful, holding Peter to blame for robbing him of the last fleeting joys of life. The sudden illusion of the hunting-field remained with him. He would cry to Jitny as if she were a mare and he her rider, using strange endearments in the broad vernacular of his land of Devon, urging,

encouraging, and threatening; his cry was still for speed, ever for more speed.

Big Peter's nerves, steady though they were, began to quiver, and when Hythe was reached he swung Jitny to the left, and travelling in a curve, rejoined the road leading back to the Farm. He was anxious now to get the Farmer back as quickly as possible, and to hand him over to the care of his daughter. Happily, the old man's mind became less disturbed as the minutes passed, he still urged Peter to speed, but Jitny had cast off horseflesh and become a moty car, and he, her passenger, was no more a reckless huntsman; he had become a motor scorcher. He laughed like some happy child and tried at times even to sing, but he was no longer drunk or mad, and the Boys felt the chill lift a little from their hearts. He was insistent to try his hand at driving, but Peter, immovable, affected not to hear. It was only after the farmyard was reached and Jitny was entering slowly on low gear that Peter allowed the old man to believe that he was himself steering Jitny in a wobbling zigzag track up to the house-gate. It was enough for glory.

"D'you see me, Bessie?" called the old man to his anxiously awaiting daughter. "D'you see me? I druv the moty car myself, a long ways I druv un. After

this, don't you ever say again that I be old."

Peter gently lifted the old man out and carried him back to his room, where instantly he became quiet, seemingly forgot the late, wild ride altogether, talked of moty cars as things which were not vit and proper for the likes of him, and told the wondering Boys that some day, maybe, when they came again, he might accept their invitation to go for a run. "But not now, boys. I be skeered of they things. They move too quick for me. In a year or two maybe I shall get used to un, but I bain't old enough yet. It be main kind of you to ask me, but I bain't got the heart for it yet."

He shook hands with them, rather listlessly, said they were growed, and where was their lady mother and their good father, "outside waiting, maybe?" "Was they going back on they bicycles all the way to Lymington?" and then—fell asleep. It was a strange, pitiful sight, and the Boys, startled, cowed by the vagaries of extreme age, crept silently from the room, solemnly bade farewell to Miss Bessie, and sadly went on their way.

For some miles on the return journey they spoke little, and then Peter said gravely, "I wish I had not asked him to go out in the car."

“It was a pity,” assented Tony. “But you couldn’t have foreseen how awful it would be. Still, I expect,” he added, ever hopeful, “that when he wakes and remembers, he will say that he has had the time of his life.”

BOOK II
WORK

CHAPTER VI

THE GREAT SHADOW

A YEAR passed, and again the season of playtime drew nigh. July of 1914 was nearly ended, and Dad, left alone in the North, prepared and tuned his faithful Jitny for the long southern trail, and recalled the delights of a year before. He longed, how he longed, for the free, unbroken weeks of August with his Boys, who, developing fast, came back to him at intervals almost as strangers, and went away all too soon, as once more the companions of his soul.

But a shadow hung over the bright prospect, and as the days passed and the storm-clouds thickened it seemed to him that they drew a black, impenetrable veil over the shining track to the South. Should the storm burst before he was away, then the motor-run, the holiday, and everything else that he loved, must be abandoned. He was the captain and must be at his post. But it also seemed just possible that he might slip away, snatch from ill-fortune a few brief days of happiness and forgetfulness, and then, if need be, fly back on the wings of steam. For over Europe

hung the Great Shadow of War. Three times of late years Dad had seen the clouds gather almost as thickly and blackly, three times he had seen them thrust away as by a miracle, the sun shine pale and cold, and the danger pass—for a while. But now, in July of 1914, it was bitterly plain that the force of miracle had been spent, that the worst which could be conceived in the womb of Terror was in the birth throes, that this time there would be no postponement. The tempest which for years had threatened civilized life with utter destruction, was about to burst.

It may seem strange that a man who knew, as Dad knew, how brief must be the interval between Peace and War, could cast himself in Jitny upon the highways, could cut himself loose from letters, telegrams, and newspapers for four long days—the longest, the cruellest, the bitterest days that any man living has known—days of waiting, when Good and Evil were springing to the most awful death-grapple in all their countless centuries of unending warfare. But in spite of all, he went, and now he can look back, with the clear-eyed wisdom which comes of dearly-bought experience, and declare that he did well to go. The issues of Peace and War lay not with him, thank God! He was a looker-on, he could do no more than prepare for what was at hand, and during the brief,

tense interval between preparation and action, he could only wait. And as he had perforce to wait, he preferred to wait where his mind was free, where as each moment passed he was drawing in deep stores of life and energy, where his jaded nerves were calmed and solaced by the ever-unfolding panorama of his beloved English landscape. Creation tottered, few were the days that remained of the old life, dark and terrible were those that loomed ahead. Who, by taking thought, can push back a landslide with his bare hands? Just as the dwellers in Pompeii danced and sang, drank and lusted, fought and made merry, while the clouds of scoriæ, which were to engulf them, gathered overhead, so Dad—typical of that old pleasure-loving English spirit, now buried miles deep in the bloody grime of war—drew Jitny tenderly from her garage on July 28, and sped away on the road to England. His mind, racked for weeks past, was now at peace. He had done what he could, the issue lay on the knees of the gods. So let it be.

And the sun shone, the broad, white road stretched before him, the untiring wheels devoured hill and dale, flying from the pleasant past towards the unknown but terrible future, Dad sped on, ever on.

* * * * *

He was bound for an old Border Castle in Northumberland, now converted to the uses of a school, where Wee Roddy, among some thirty others, was being hammered into the mould of English boyhood. Whenever Wee Roddy was due to return to school, he wept copiously, unremittingly; for hour after hour he abandoned himself to a process of dissolution. He was drowned in grief. "It is not," he would sob, "that I mind going back to school, but it is leaving you, Mother." And poor Mother, heart-broken, choking over her small son, so frail and pitiful a figure to be cast forth into the wide world, would soothe him in mother ways, buy him sweets in reckless profusion—to the exceeding discomfort of his stomach—offer him books for the journey—in choosing which his taste was for solid information—tuck him up in a railway carriage, and return broken in spirit to a desolate home. Three times a year Roddy would carry with him her bleeding heart. He would weep for fully half the journey, and then turn for comfort to "Motor Mechanics for Beginners," or "How to Become a Scout"—later on, it was "Why We are at War"—and seek for oblivion in their profound pages. Wee Roddy had an artist's eye for form and colour, but we have not observed in him any of that thirst for literature which at the age of four, impelled Big Peter to memorize the "Jackdaw of Rheims." On

arrival at school he would pass twenty-four hours in utter, unrelieved dejection, another twenty-four hours in recovery, and the rest of the term in full content with his environment.

Among his boy friends he was something of an Oracle. His wisdom and his complete grasp of life staggered their unreflecting minds. He would offer a confident solution of the most obdurate problems, produce hard facts from the "Children's Encyclopædia" to conclude any argument, and baffle those of his schoolmasters who sought to unravel the tangle within him of childishness and mature age. Once, on a dismal half-holiday, grey and soaking, he strode bare-headed to the river which runs near the Castle, dipped his fingers in the waters, and invoked the gods of the stream to stay the flood and compel the sun to shine. Sure enough the sun came out and the rain ceased. Roddy, being a shrewd youth, could not be induced afterwards to repeat this miracle, but his reputation as Sir Oracle and wonder-worker was assured, and had he not rather tardily developed an interest in games he might have grown to be a prig of prigs. From this depth he was saved, but Wee Roddy will never be like other boys. He is altogether too wise, too learned (except in school books), and too self-centred. He weighs the world in his own balance.

As Dad flew towards the South he met many cars coming North. Piled with luggage, they were the advance guard of that great London migration which, in those far, remote days of peace, used to set in towards the end of July and continue well into September. The shadow of war had not changed our habits. A few days later and those cars, with luggage unstrapped, were streaming like frightened birds southward. The homing instinct, in days of peril, is as strong among men as among pigeons.

Those who have not crossed by road the borders that separate countries, which, though distinct, are akin, are apt to regard the, much-waving line, with its entrants and salients, as wholly artificial. But it is not so. The northern Border is as real still, as if it were a Roman Wall; cross it anywhere from the north or from the south, and within five minutes one is conscious of the change of country. Longtown, three miles to the south, is plain, bare, and unlovely, there is nothing in it of English profusion or grace of decoration, but no one, even the least observant, could doubt that it is in England. Three miles away, Dumfriesshire is as unmistakably Scotch. Many times, journeying south, Dad has hailed this unattractive township on the Solway Moss with extravagant joy, and departed from it northwards with a downcast heart. Its kindly folk, speaking with a

broad Cumbrian burr, have seemed to welcome him when coming South, and to bid him Godspeed and a safe return when he has sped from them towards the North. Longtown has a spiritual beauty in his foolish eyes, of which its inhabitants are, probably, wholly unconscious.

Upon a wooded hillside, not far from the Robber Castle, stands an Inn. In front the road winds down towards the valley; on one side is a wide yard where Jitny may repose, on the other is a garden bright with flowers, at the back is a large paddock. The road leads nowhere; after traversing the valley it returns upon itself; the Inn stands alone: yet it flourishes. This is a deep mystery. Within this Inn where Dad always lay (we love the old word) when he visited Roddy in his Castle, are many doors, steep stairs, and narrow passages. The incautious guest is with difficulty saved from diving into a deep, cool cellar, immediately after his arrival, and always wanders, when seeking repose, into some other guest's bedroom. As all do it, no one is disturbed. Here, at this romantic, adventurous Inn, Dad was in the habit of securing a sitting-room, a large bedroom, perfect cleanliness, excellent cooking, and a glowing welcome, for a sum so small that, should we tell it, all Northumberland would be scoured, the Castle and the Inn discovered, and its charms destroyed.

When Dad arrived at his Inn late that afternoon, he made two discoveries. First that a lady with her three little girls was in occupation. To her had been allotted a sitting-room and many bedrooms. But as it is a Magic Inn, there are always sitting-rooms and bedrooms for travellers, however numerous and exacting, though to the gross, material eye the size of the building remains unaltered. His second discovery was that, flushed by prosperity—as magic in its dimensions as the Inn itself—the owners had built a new bathroom, but that the workmen had departed before putting on the door. Something vital had, of course, to be omitted—the bath or the door—they had selected the door. When Dad went upstairs a curtain, suspended by nails stuck precariously into moist plaster, hung in the doorway of the bathroom. He touched the curtain; it fell. There were clearly opportunities for embarrassment in that bathroom. So he sought out his fellow-guest, the mother of the three little girls, and thus boldly addressed her.

“Madam, you have a boy at the Castle yonder, so have I. My son, if you ask him, will vouch for my character, he is quite unscrupulous. Let us confer upon the most interesting problem presented by that doorless bathroom.”

She was a woman of spirit. She laughed; her grandmother would have swooned. “I

feel," she replied, "as if we were Fellow Voyagers adrift after shipwreck in an open boat. That is a situation which, though it seems appalling upon land, resolves itself with extraordinary simplicity at sea. So, at least, I have been told by those who have experienced it."

"So have I," said Dad. "That curtain, you will observe, is not to be depended upon. At any moment, the most embarrassing, it may fail us. I am indeed convinced that it will."

"I am sure of it," said she. "When I heard that you were coming, I admit that I blushed, but now that you have come, there does not seem to be a blush to the pair of us. Still, I think it would be well to arrange our baths so that we may, in spite of the open doorway, preserve the remains of our modesty."

Dad laughed. "You are very good; you make our painful situation easy for us both. Will you, in the morning, go first and shout to me when you go and when you return? Then I will issue forth, and warn you to keep your room during the high adventure. As for your daughters, I do not suppose they would mind if they took their baths in the garden."

"Not in the least," said she. So it was settled.

Dad then walked down to the Castle and

broke in upon Wee Roddy in his dormitory. He was sitting up in bed, explaining to the five other boys in his room the uses of a set of Scout billy-cans, which he had spread out before him on the counterpane. Roddy had, it appeared, invested one-and-threepence of his savings in these utensils, not for his own entertainment, but in order to curb the terrible extravagance of his sire. "You will see," he was observing, "here I have two saucepans, a frying-pan, and a cover which may be used as a dish. My father shall buy a spirit-stove, and we will have all our meals by the roadside. I will make soup in this pan from Oxo in cubes, and prepare Irish-stew in this one from meat and vegetables. We can boil eggs in either of them. The frying-pan will do for bacon. For tea the saucepans will come in again, and when they are empty we can carry all our food in them. For one-and-threepence I shall have saved my father pounds and pounds. I expect when he finds this out he will pay me back."

At this point the other boys, who had grasped the identity of the visitor, roared with laughter, but Roddy was unmoved.

"Hullo, Dad!" he observed. "So you've arrived? How is Jitny? You see these billy-cans. They cost one-and-threepence and will save you pounds and pounds on our tours. You will soon now be able to get the cottage

in Hampshire and the twelve acres. Perhaps you won't have to wait for me to grow up, after all. I thought of making a tent for us to sleep in at night, out of old sacks, but it might let in the rain. Then we should catch cold and have to waste money on doctors."

"That would be most annoying," agreed Dad. "You see," he went on, addressing the other boys, "Roddy takes great care of me, and thinks of everything. Without his billy-cans our tour would be a whirl of dissipation. When he grows up he is going to be a millionaire, and buy me a cottage in Hampshire."

"I expect he will, too," said one boy. "Roddy is a beastly mise. Of course, sir," he explained hurriedly, fearful of a failure in the politeness due to a guest, "he is all right to mise if he's going to buy you a cottage."

Dad strolled round the room, sitting on the boys' beds, telling them the wildest stories, rousing up a joyful clamour, destructive of all discipline, until he was collared by an outraged schoolmaster and ignominiously expelled. "Come back soon," shouted the boys, as Dad was led away. "Come and be one of our masters."

Dad dined at the Castle, and returned up the dark hill to his Inn. When he went upstairs, and neared the bathroom, the curtain hung precariously, one side drooping; a bright light shone in the room, and from the

shrieks, splashings, and laughter, Dad concluded that the entire female staff of the Inn was at that moment wallowing in the new bath. A piece of paper, upon which the word "Engaged" was written, had been thoughtfully pinned upon the curtain. As he stood for a moment smiling at this naïve warning, there came a faint rap upon the floor. Another nail had come out, the curtain drooped still further to one side, it was about to fall! Dad fled to his own quarters, but he could plainly hear through the closed door a wild outburst of shrieking laughter from the bathroom. The curtain *had* fallen!

In the morning the Fellow Voyagers carried out their programme, and the baths were enjoyed without shock to their modesty. None, at least, which mattered. "How did the curtain serve you?" inquired the mother of the little girls, when she encountered Dad after breakfast. "First-rate," said he. "It held nobly. But I had to put it up myself. It was on the floor when I arrived."

She laughed. "So I expected. It began to droop just as I got out of the bath. I was scared, and without waiting to dry myself, huddled on a dressing-gown and fled. So it was down by the time I had called you. What an escape!"

Dad observed that a bathroom without a door seemed to lead to good fellowship

among those who fell within its embarrassing influence.

“True,” assented his Fellow Voyager. “But still I think that as a regular practice, I prefer them to have doors.”

Dad reluctantly bade farewell to his new friend, whose strain of freakish humour mingled so agreeably with his own, and departing from the romantic Inn, drove Jitny down to the Castle. There he met Wee Roddy laden with luggage and billy-cans, and panting for the delights of their tour.

“Why, what has come to Jitny?” exclaimed that observant youth. “I was listening for her bark, and she slid up like a grey ghost.”

“She has a new silencer,” explained her owner proudly. “Her bark has become a gentle puff, and horses no longer leap out of their skins at her approach. What is more, she has a new carburettor, with three jets; she can now stroll sedately or fly with immense vigour, all to a touch of the finger.”

“That is splendid,” remarked Roddy, as he climbed in; “but I hope that she won’t use up more petrol than she did, for you know petrol is frightfully expensive, and you can’t afford it.”

“Nothing escapes you, most thrifty one,” replied Dad. “I have hopes that we have started upon a new career of the severest economy. Indeed, I am sure of it, for the

advertisements of my carburettor assert that its use saves many gallons of spirit, and long experience has convinced me that the advertisement columns of newspapers are the only literary productions worthy of complete belief. My faith in them is absolute."

Roddy thought for a while over this remarkable statement; he dissected it carefully, looking for traces of that whimsical love for "leg-pulling" which he deplored in his frivolous parent, and then delivered his verdict. "I expect that you are about right. For if one sells people things by pretending that they are good when they aren't, they get savage and don't buy from you any more."

"That's the idea!" assented Dad; "and people would get on better in business if they always lived up to it."

"Thank you, Dad," said Wee Roddy gravely. "What you say will be a great help when I go into business, and I shall become a millionaire frightfully quickly. There isn't too much time, as you and Mother are getting pretty old, and I don't want you to have to wait very long for the cottage I promised you."

Thus pleasantly communing, Dad and his small son sped away to Newcastle, where they purposed to join the Great North Road and to travel by this highway towards the far South. True to his oath not to read a

newspaper for four days, Dad had avoided the seductive sheets which lay broadcast within the Castle, but when he passed through the streets of Newcastle his eye could not wholly be unconscious of the flaming bills. "Russia Mobilizes" they proclaimed in all styles of type, set for prodigious emphasis, and at every corner they blazed at him in red and black and blue. "Russia Mobilizes." He was accustomed to the emphatic assertions of newspaper bills, and to the more modest paragraphs inside, upon which they were hardily based, but already the parenthetical "(Official)" had begun to appear without which, ere long, no printed statements could compel interest and coppers. "Russia Mobilizes (Official)," screamed the bills, until even Roddy, who never read a newspaper, perceived them and inquired, "What does mobilize mean? Why has Russia mobilized, Dad?"

"I would that I knew," groaned Dad. "But it means something very bad, indeed, for all of us."

"Does it mean that Russia is going to war? They were talking about it at school."

"It means, I am afraid, something very like that, old man. Austria declared war on Servia yesterday, and Russia is mobilizing—that is, calling up all its army, so as to protect the Servians. That looks to me like

war all over Europe by the time we get to the Isle of Wight."

"But Russia and Austria are a long way off. I remember them on the map. What do they matter to us? If they fight, why should all the other people be so silly as to fight too? Why should people want to fight one another? I don't want to fight, you don't want to fight, why should anybody? We are all much happier as we are now."

"If we all had a grain of sense, old chap, there would not be any wars. But we haven't any, not a scrap. Germany thinks that England owns too much of the world, and wants to take what we have away from us. That is at the bottom of all this wretched business."

"Then we must fight, too, Dad!" The proud, English spirit awoke in the small boy, the unconquerable spirit which had come down to him from countless generations of warlike ancestors. "We must fight, too, and we will. The beastly Germans shan't have a scrap of what we've got."

"But that will cost a frightful lot of money, Wee Roddy; all we have got," observed Dad, smiling.

"Well, what will be the use of our money if the Germans take it all away? We must use it to fight the brutes. I have ten pounds four shillings and threepence in the Savings Bank. I will give it all to fight the Germans."

“Oh, Roddy, Roddy,” groaned Dad, “you shame me. Here am I distracted by thinking of what is to become of us all, of Mother and you Boys, of Little Jane and me, worrying my heart out at the prospect of privation, and the destruction of all my plans. And you, my small, thrifty son, would throw to the country your money-box, your hoarded wealth, and give yourself, if need be. Is it not so, Roddy, my son?”

“I am not old enough to fight,” replied Roddy gravely. “I am only eleven. But Peter is, and Tony will be soon. Peter is eighteen and Tony fifteen. I am a Boy Scout, and will look after Mother and Little Jane, and perhaps I could leave school and earn money to keep them, if you had to go and fight, too.”

“You lighten my heart, old fellow,” cried Dad.

At Durham they stopped for lunch, after crossing the bridge and wedging a precarious way through a press of traffic in the steepest and narrowest of streets leading to the market-square. A thronging crowd of cars was moving northwards, and there was no sign in the busy streets of the shadow of War which hung over the land. Even then, to most people, educated and uneducated, well-informed and ignorant, there had come but one more of the many scares which had of late years frightened the country for a while and then

passed harmless. This was a bigger scare, that was all. So plans remained unchanged, cars sped north, the shops were full, the one thought was of the holidays now so near at hand. This was Wednesday, and by Friday night rich and poor would be free to enjoy the coming Bank-Holiday, and many would be free for the whole of the shining August month. The bills might cry, "Russia Mobilizes (Official)," but Russia was a long way off on the map; we were in England, and were the conflicts of Servia, or of Austria, or of Russia worth the bones of a single British soldier or sailor? This was Wednesday, and by Saturday or Monday at latest, the shadow would have passed.

In Durham, under the impulse of Wee Roddy's spirit of economy—he had dismissed War from his elastic mind—Dad bought a spirit-lamp, sugar, tea, condensed-milk, and biscuits, so as to save pounds and pounds by the employment of the billy-cans. But when near Boroughbridge they alighted and fell to the preparation of a meal, the results were not wholly satisfactory. The spirit-lamp may have been inadequate to the enterprise, or the gusts of wind may have diverted its heat from the purpose of boiling water, but the fact remained that the water in the billy-can would not boil. For a full hour they struggled, used up a pint of spirit, and, finally, had to be content with a few

spoonfuls of condensed milk and the biscuits. They had failed to make even tea, and it seemed beyond the aspirations of even Wee Roddy's hardihood to essay Irish-stew, eggs, and all the other delights that he had designed for their wayside sustenance. Sadly the travellers pursued their way, convinced by this untoward experience that cooking even of the simplest kind required an apprenticeship served within doors. "We shall have to put off using the billy-cans," said Dad, "until we have practised a bit in a house," and Roddy reluctantly gave his assent. "It is most disappointing," he confessed. "Our tea, rotten as it was, has cost us much more than if we had stopped at a shop."

They put up for the night at Wetherby, far down in Yorkshire, a pleasant little town upon the Wharfe, and here they strolled about before dinner and fell into conversation with many of the townsfolk who had gathered upon the bridge and were gazing contemplatively at the cool river. The chief industry of Wetherby appears to be hotels and public-houses. It has a population of only 2,212, and yet Dad and Roddy counted thirteen hotels and public-houses, all apparently thriving, and they reached this surprising total without penetrating into the back streets. Yet it is a very bright and cheerful town, and enjoys, we doubt not, a character for the strictest sobriety.

The townsfolk of Wetherby, enjoying the cool breeze from the river, paid no heed to the low rumbling which presaged the tempest of war. They regarded such things as an affair of the newspapers, bereft by the summer weather of the deeper interests of football. Wetherby was, it seemed, discussing the fishing-season, now near its close, the shooting-season about to open on the Yorkshire moors, and Doncaster, a few miles distant. War, when they gave it a thought, was to them the business of professionals—the Navy, the Army, who were paid to fight if needs be—but was no concern of the people, except in so far as it affected the prices of things which they bought or sold. Only in so far as it might lose or gain them money, could war penetrate the circle of their interests. And Wetherby, that little Yorkshire township, was a microcosm of that wide England of July, 1914, tranquil, peaceful under the sunshine, upon which the storm was about to break. In the hotel, where Dad and Roddy had put up, and to which they presently returned, the news of the day was not even mentioned. Dad, who had received his lesson on the bridge, said nothing, and it was not the concern of anyone—either host or guests—to talk of aught but the weather and the coming holidays. More than once at dinner, Dad looked round the little room, where a dozen people were chatting gaily and audibly,

and wondered if he was the one anxious fool in a wise and placid world. And then he reflected that if heedlessness were at this crisis the truest wisdom, he had indeed proved himself to be wiser than his fellow-guests, for, knowing and fearing more than they did, he had cast himself with Roddy and Jitny upon the open road. "If I were in earnest," he thought, "and not a humbug, I should be at work instead of playing the fool out here upon the Great North Road. Perhaps, after all, these people are as anxious as I am, but are resolute not to go to meet their troubles." The travellers retired early so as to resume their journey betimes, and to get within the suction area of London by the following evening.

Next morning they ran down to Doncaster, and paused for a moment to telegraph their movements to Mother in the South. "Austria Captures Belgrade (Official)," shouted one newspaper bill, "German Rush for Gold," soberly declared another, and this latter one struck Dad heavily between the eyes. It was to be expected that the Austrians would overwhelm Belgrade, since they had started to invade Servia. So far, events had pursued their natural and inevitable course, but a German raid upon the Bank of England meant much more; it meant that the war of finance, which precedes a war of guns and men, had already broken out, and was

being desperately waged at that moment in London. "Good old Bank!" he murmured. "Germany is after our gold. Things are beginning to get lively."

Still he would not be diverted from his purpose; he was out to drive Jitny to the Isle of Wight, and go on he would. The dust was thick, it worked its way into throats and eyes and skin, but the new carburettor was a brilliant success, and the tyres were kind. Intent upon his job, Dad had no leisure for thought, and Roddy, beside him, had forgotten the idle billy-cans and the fate which threatened his Savings Bank deposit, in the pure joy of the road. It was a very pleasing country which they traversed that day, redolent of a history when wars were simple and local, when a man might placidly plough his farm, unconscious of the battle which was raging on the other side of the hill. They passed Newark and Grantham and Stamford and towards evening turned aside from the main road so as to spend the night at Huntingdon.

There were no signs of apprehension in the streets of Huntingdon, which was busily preparing for the coming holiday, but in the hotel, Dad heard some faint echoes of the storm of rage and terror and despair, which throughout that long day—Thursday, July 30—had convulsed Westminster and the City. The echoes were, however, but faint.

"If something is not done to-morrow," said one, lightly to Dad, as he passed the salt, "we shall all be bankrupt. No jobber would make a price in the House to-day." He was a member of the Stock Exchange, and spoke with the insouciance of his type—what matter being bankrupt so long as all are hammered together! "And the Bank?" asked Dad. "Oh, the Rate will be ten per cent. to-morrow, twenty per cent., anything. All credit has gone, and one might as well light one's pipe with the best securities, for all the use that they are just now. This soup is quite good. Not a bad hotel this. I am going North to-morrow, in my car. I couldn't get away till late in the afternoon."

"I wonder that you dare to go away from Town!" observed Dad.

"I wonder that any of us dare do anything. The world is crumbling under our feet, and yet we go on just as before, when the ground was firm. I can come back if things get worse, and in the meantime I've shut up my office for the rest of the week. That is the safest thing to do just now."

The cheerful, prospective Bankrupt finished his dinner with appetite, offered Dad an excellent cigar, and as they smoked together, inquired anxiously about the state of the roads to the North. There must, upon that fatal evening, have been thousands like him who, with all their gods going to smash about

them, ate their food, smoked their cigars, and made their plans, without any realization of what the future meant for them.

In the morning the man from the Stock Exchange came down early to breakfast and found Dad and Roddy at table. He was bright and fresh, and his tottering fortunes had, evidently, not disturbed his sleep. He had a paper in his hand, and offered it to Dad, who pushed the forbidden thing away. "I am under a vow," said he, "not to read a paper till this evening. For four days I am to see nothing but the bills in the streets."

"A very good sort of vow, too. I will take it at once, and if my partners complain of my neglect of business, I will refer them to you. But, seriously, just now it would not be a bad thing if we read the papers less. We shall know the worst soon enough."

"It is going to be the very worst!" gravely remarked Dad.

"I suppose so," he assented, with undiminished cheerfulness. "Can you spare me a boiled egg, young fellow? You are eating one and sitting on two more."—Roddy apologized.—"I am all for the simple life, and if I come an almighty smash now, which seems to be quite certain, there is plenty of time to try again." He had no thought then of the coming call upon our manhood, but

though Dad never saw him after that morning, he does not doubt that within a month that hardy, cheery creature was encased in khaki, and had better work on hand than the making of another fortune.

From Huntingdon the motorists journeyed south to Hatfield, and then swept round London in a wide circle, through St. Albans, Watford, and Uxbridge. They had planned to stop somewhere on the Winchester road, but time hung on their hands, and Wee Roddy proposed that a bend back to the south-west of London, and a break in upon Mother and Little Jane, who were staying there, would be an enterprise worthy of their adventurous spirits. Dad eagerly agreed, for his anxieties increased with every minute. It was Friday, July 31, the last day of peace. In Hatfield he had read upon the bills "Stock Exchange Closed. Bank Rate eight per cent." So his late friend was right. Credit had gone, and all securities were unsaleable. The end was very near, and at Watford he met it face to face. There it was staring from the street walls: "Germany proclaims Martial Law (Official)." From that step, that fatal step, to open war, was a matter of hours, perhaps of only minutes. He would complete his journey and then, with his scattered family gathered under the parental wings, would fly away North, where his urgent

duties called for his presence. It had been a very pleasant run, the old world of his youth and middle-age had, during the four days of it, come to an end; a new world was opening before him, before his Boys, before the gay, heedless people of England. Would the England of to-day and to-morrow be true to the England of the past? Dad thought of Wee Roddy, who at a word of danger had cheerfully offered up his cherished savings upon the altar of country. He thought of Big Peter, the Sergeant of O.T.C., of Tony, a private in that admirable Corps. If his Boys were sound, then would the millions of other boys in England be sound also. He had no doubt of his own Boys, and why, therefore, should he doubt of those others who now, without warning, saw a World War thrust upon them? And as he thought he grew almost cheerful. What a chance lay before these boys, to live, to work, to die, if so privileged, for this fair land of theirs, surely the land of all others for which boys and men would most cheerfully die. He suffered from no pleasant illusions. This was not going to be a war of professional armies but a fight to the death between nations. While England's superb Navy held the seas the young manhood of Great Britain would be called upon to fight upon land. That was so clear to him that, for a moment, his heart

sank. The young manhood of Britain meant for him just one young man—Big Peter. He thought of the little boy, his firstborn, and traced his progress through that glorious youth which had, it seemed, led up to one thing, and one thing only. He knew the spirit of Big Peter. The call would come to him among the first. There would be no thought with him of leaving to others his privileges of race. He would throw everything aside, the longed-for University career, the peaceful, maybe brilliant future; he would cry out: "I am trained, see my sergeant's stripes. I am here, send me." Yes, be the call for many or for few, Big Peter would go. And though the father's heart might turn to water, that of the man swelled in pride for his big son. So let it be.

And in his training-camp far away, among the thousands who daily awaited orders to break up and march to their war stations, Big Peter and Tony talked together. "I shall go at once," said Peter, "as soon as I can choose a regiment. Dad will know." And Tony, groaning under his fifteen years, all too few for his spirit, cried bitterly, "Oh, you lucky, lucky beast. If I had been in the Navy I might have gone too. Perhaps it is not too late. I will ask Dad, he will know."

The call had not yet come, but Peter and Tony already heard it in their hearts. And

the whole of their Corps heard it, and all those thousands of others who had known nothing but peace, the easy life of games, the conflicts with schoolmasters, the breaking of rules. All in one day became men.

CHAPTER VII

THE ANTHILL

It was a happy thought of Wee Roddy that the travellers should bend back to the south-west of London and break in upon Mother and Little Jane. For it brought before Dad a sight which he will never forget—the outpouring of the holiday folk of London on that fatal Friday afternoon and the following Saturday morning. As he swept round in a wide semi-circle and crossed in succession the Oxford, Bath, and Portsmouth Roads, the rolling flood of traffic filled him with amazement, almost with horror. There they came in an interminable procession—motor buses, stately private cars piled with luggage, little things like his own, four-horsed chars-à-bancs, aged dug-out traps, and costers' barrows with a decorated moke between the shafts—there they came, in a vast, slow flood, with speed held back as in a Derby Day congestion, pouring along the wide arteries which led from the heart of England towards the open spaces of the countryside. “How can they do it?” groaned Dad. “How can they tour on such a day as this?”

“But aren’t we tourists?” asked Roddy, puzzled, and the simple question smote Dad as if it were a blow on raw flesh. For, to all appearance, and indeed in fact, they were themselves the most hardened of tourists. Jitny, untouched for four days—except to be filled with oil and petrol—was smothered in the dust of thirteen counties. Dad, who had in his heart dared to find fault with his fellow-men, was himself burned red by sun and wind and by the glare from nearly five hundred miles of road. While others, during those critical days, had worked and sweated and despaired, he had been free of the open road—what right, forsooth, had he to set himself above his fellows!

“Wee Roddy,” he groaned, “you are always right. We ourselves are indeed tourists like these others. We fiddle now while Rome is burning, and worse than they, we have fiddled for four long days. If shame there be, it is upon us more than upon these others who, perhaps, are, during a brief respite, seeking strength for that which is before them.”

“After all,” observed Roddy in his slow, contemplative way, “are we not all quite helpless? If there is to be war, as you say, we can’t possibly prevent it. We shan’t fight any better for grousing over what can’t be helped. I expect that Big Peter and Tony are just chortling at the chance

of real war after playing at soldiers for years."

When, later in the day, Jitny drew into the suburb on the river, where Mother and Little Jane were to be found, Dad put up his car at a hotel garage and listened to the talk of the crowds by the railway-station and in the hotel yard. That the brilliant weather would hold through the week-end, and that all this scare business would quickly be over, were the aspirations most frequently overheard. The people's minds were fixed upon two things—that the coming holiday was a sure and certain fact, and that the war scare was a vision of frightened journalists and politicians. In the competition of interests, the war scare had no chance at all against the holiday. Now and then a more serious note would sound. "Awful day in the House yesterday," observed one. "Seven firms were hammered and a hundred more would have gone to-day but for the closing down. I should have burst badly myself, and so would most of my friends. Good old Committee!" "It will be better on Tuesday," said another, little conscious that the Stock Exchange doors, which had closed that morning, would remain shut for five months. "We shall know the worst by then." "Thank goodness," cried another, "that we, at any rate, are out of this rotten war. It can't touch us much here at home."

“ Make way there,” growled a policeman. “ You gentlemen are blocking up the gates.” The more serious group broke up, the crowds of holiday-makers swept into the station, and the packed trains roared in and out. Those were the popular notes of that Friday afternoon—the prospect of settled weather for the holiday, the Stock Exchange panic happily quelled by the bold closing down of the House, and “ Thank goodness, we are out of this rotten war. It can’t touch us much here at home.”

As a nation we were, in July, 1914, utterly untrained and undisciplined. We were a people whose wars had been “ colonial,” affairs of a professional Army, for whom the ring had been kept by a supreme professional Navy. South Africa had frightened us for a few weeks, but the call for service had been heard by few except those partly trained—the Militia and the Volunteers. The people, as a mass, had looked on, trembled for awhile and paid, for was not that their job ?

But while the great mass of civilians, wholly untrained and undisciplined, thought on that Friday of little but holidays and the weather, the small leaven of men in khaki, scattered up and down the country, drew aside into little groups and talked gravely of other things.

One such group stood not far from Dad and Roddy, a small draft of Territorials, under a

young subaltern, who awaited the train which was to bear them to a southern camp. Dad slipped up to this khaki group, standing stiff and silent among the gay throngs of pleasure-seekers, and presently the officer turned to him and smiled at his grimy face and dust-strewn clothes.

“Have you come far, sir?” asked he.

“From the North,” replied Dad. “I have been four days upon the road.”

“Are the people blind everywhere—are they all like this lot?” He waved his hand contemptuously at the station crowds, and his men smiled.

“I have not yet observed one solitary sign,” said Dad gravely, “that our people realize what is coming upon them.”

“Not one,” agreed the officer, a young fellow of some twenty years, erect and smart, a forerunner of that army of new officers which was to spring at the call of Kitchener from our public schools and universities, “not one. Well, poor dears, let them have their week-end. It will be the last of their playtime. I know nothing, of course, but I am as sure as if I had seen the Orders that the Army will mobilize on Monday, and that we shall then all be embodied. It is lucky that most of us are ready in camp. The guards have been set to-day at all railway bridges, tunnels, and harbours. I did not think, when I put this uniform on a week

ago, that it would probably last me my life."

"This is rather a pitiful sight," remarked Dad, still regarding the thronging crowds. "For you this war will be a great opportunity, but for these people all wars are things apart, and all they say is: 'Thank goodness, we are out of it!'"

"But I say—thank goodness we are in it, or shall be in it within a day or two. For war, horrible as it is, will be the making of us all. You are sure, sir, that we shall be in it?" he inquired anxiously.

"Up to the neck," declared Dad confidently. "By Monday or Tuesday at the latest. They don't know it, not one of them," he waved his arm towards the station, "but we know it in our bones. It is the year 1911 over again, with the certainty this time that Germany will not climb down."

"Good!" cried the young officer. "I pray that you may be right."

Dad and Roddy burst in upon the astonished Mother and Little Jane, who fell upon their dirty necks, and then recoiled from the grime of them. "Oh, you pair of horrors, wash, wash heartily, and then come and talk to me. I am just dying to learn what it all means."

When Dad came down he found Mother impatiently awaiting him. "The papers have been awful these days," she cried, "and I

have had no one to ask about them. What does it all mean? Is all this horror just another scare, or does it really mean——” She paused.

“Yes, War. It means no less than War over the whole of Europe, and war at once. Even now it may have begun.”

“But surely not for us. What have we to do with Austrian or Russian quarrels?”

“Servia is only the pretext. This war has been planned for years, and Germany is going to fight at this moment because she thinks that we are done, used up, impotent. But you will see most surprising things. Our Fleet is mobilized, theirs is not, and we shall strike at once.”

“But it is frightful, horrible! What do we want with war? How can God permit it?”

“My dear,” said Dad very gravely, “a great many people in many languages will ask that question next week, and will seek in vain for an answer. Better not ask, for that way lies madness—or utter unbelief.”

“I wish the Boys were with us. At a time like this we should be all together. I have so longed for you, dear.”

“Then make the most of me, sweetheart, for on Monday I fly away to the North.”

“Oh, must you go, and you so needing a holiday? It is wicked, cruel. Must you go?”

“Needs must, my dear, when the Devil—or the Kaiser—drives. I must go; my people will be at their wits’ end. I have had a splendid holiday, four whole days of the open road, and now a week-end with you. Then I must go. But be consoled, the Boys will be back from camp before I leave.”

“Oh no. They have still a week of camp.”

“Oh yes. The old world has ended, and in the new one there will be many changes. The O.T.C. camp will break up before the Army mobilizes, which will be very soon now. It will be nice for you to have the Boys.”

He said nothing of the call which was already ringing in the ears of Big Peter. Mother would learn of it soon enough, poor thing!

Dad did not start very early next morning, Saturday, August 1. It was but a short way to the Isle of Wight, as distances are reeled out by a motor engine, and he was still fascinated by the holiday crowds. The outgoing flood of people seemed to be undiminished in volume or in cheerfulness. It poured continually along, and was even more light-hearted than that of yesterday, if that were possible. And, indeed, it may well have been so, since the Saturday crowds came from a class of smaller pay and shorter holidays than those of Thursday and Friday, and its units could not be diverted by an earth-

quake from enjoying every moment of a Bank Holiday. These Saturday throngs were indifferent to failures on the Stock Exchange—which seemed to have most impressed their masters—and indifferent, too, to the wholly incomprehensible placards, “Bank Rate Ten per cent.,” which for Dad spelt out the intensity of the financial peril. It was enough for those in the crowds that they had money in their pockets. What was the Bank Rate to them! They shouted and sang as the trains passed in and out, packed too closely to read the morning’s news, even if some hardy souls had thought to attempt an enterprise so unprofitable.

There had, however, been some attempts to read, though not very successful ones, for newspapers, cast aside, littered the station platform. Dad, freed from his vow of abstinence, picked one up. He does not remember its name, but it was a horrible sheet, shrieking, hysterical—no wonder that it had been cast aside, or that the people, fed upon such trash, had come to regard the supreme crisis of their lives as just another newspaper scare. It may, after the lapse of time, seem now almost unbelievable that on Saturday, August 1, the crowds which Dad watched, did not differ at all—except, perhaps, in their greater volume—from those scores of others which he had watched in former years. There were ever present and con-

spicuous the old cheerfulness, the inimitable Cockney humour, the joyous freedom of restraint between the sexes, the air of complete indifference towards the past and the future. Dad—it must be told to his credit—did feel himself to be a forlorn prig as he stood, a silent, absorbed figure, and watched those cheery souls out to enjoy every minute of their holiday. He did feel dimly that perhaps these holiday-makers were, in their way, displaying the same quality of serene wisdom upon which he had congratulated himself four days earlier. Even if they believed that war were certain they could not, by taking thought, and grieving in mean and dusty streets, postpone its coming by an instant. Were not these holiday crowds, like those others of yesterday, and those throngs upon the highways, wisely seeking for strength to face with courage the troubles that lay before them? And in any case it did not lie with Dad, who had enjoyed four days in Jitny upon the open road, and purposed to snatch from Fate a week-end in the Garden Island, it did not lie with him to cast stones at his fellowmen. And so humbled, he left the station, drew Jitny from her garage, and sped away once more with Roddy upon the roads which he loved.

London, in those days before the War, and in those tragic days which followed, was like some huge anthill. The ants, released

from their busy labours, scattered over the ground, seeking only the delights of freedom. Then stirred, as by some giant hand with a cruel stick, realizing at last that a terrific disaster threatened their peaceful homes, they scurried back, impelled by the one dominating instinct which commands frightened creatures to seek in peril the shelter of their holes. For a day or two they crouched, poor frightened ants, and then, as by a miracle, the ants became men and women, strong to fight and to endure. No man will see again what we all saw during those early days of August, 1914. The ants rejoicing in their play, the ants scattered, terrified, flying before the storm to their poor shelters, and then drawn together, consolidated, all conscious of a common danger and a common cause, ants no longer, marching forth from the anthill as men and women. Truly had that young subaltern spoken when he said that War would be the making of us all.

Having now arrived at the wholesome conclusion that he was neither morally nor intellectually superior to his fellow-creatures, Dad put off the rôle of Cato the Censor, which so ill became him, and resumed those easy-fitting garments of Horatian philosophy which had for long been his everyday wear. In those far-off years before the War, England of the Twentieth Century closely resembled Rome of the First, and history, after long

years, was to repeat itself and to purge the hedonism of England as it had purged the hedonism of Rome. Upon England, as upon Rome, was coming a grapple for life or death with the unchanging hordes of barbarians from Central Europe. Rome, the material, fell, but the spirit of Rome, immortal, remained, and born again in France and Britain—aye, in all the Britains linked by the seas of the world—held the fortress of Roman civilization though all the Goths might rage against it.

It was a pleasant journey. Dad travelled by the same road through Guildford and Winchester which he had taken with Tony a year before, and was incommoded only by the outward flow of traffic in which Jitny was buried as an inconspicuous unit. The density of this flow was extraordinary; it poured along like some great spate from a burst inexhaustible reservoir, and as if that Saturday were the first and not the third or fourth day of the flood. In the bottleneck of Guildford High Street, where two main roads converged to a junction, movement became almost impossible, and it seemed as if nothing but an earthquake which levelled the houses, or a bomb which cleared away the cars, could open out a passage. Jitny was busily occupied for half an hour in traversing three hundred yards, and all other vehicles were in like case, for the pace

of the slowest was the pace of the most rapid. All were blocked impartially. Fortunately the movement was nearly all in one direction, and when at last Jitny, guided by Dad's now skilful hands, worked out of the press, the Winchester road opened comparatively clear, since the main stream was set towards Portsmouth.

We will not follow the travellers upon their well-worn road. It was long since any troubles of their engine or tyres had given them the smallest concern. Jitny was not immune from the little trials which beset all mechanical vehicles, but they knew her now to the uttermost detail of working, and detected instantly through her quiet hum the intrusive voice of complaint. Dad and Roddy now laughed over those early days when, upon this same road, Dad and Tony had been consumed with anxiety lest, in Little Jane's words, the "works should run down."

At Lymington, which they reached in the early afternoon, Wee Roddy must, of course, be allowed the gratification of pointing out the garage where his eagle eye, directed by a thoughtful brain, had brought confusion upon his seniors, and Dad, conscious now of a skill and knowledge, bought by past mistakes, did not grudge his small son the little triumph of reminiscence. They were the closest of friends, those two, the greying man and the small boy of eleven, they had

become knit in sympathy by the constant association of five days of travel—the longest period in Dad's recollection during which he had enjoyed the unbroken society of one of his own children. If Jitny had brought him nothing else, she had brought a great opportunity—rarely possible in other conditions—of intimately communing with the hearts and souls of his splendid Boys. Jitny had returned to him in full measure what the English boarding school system—vitally necessary as it is in the building up of men—had nearly stolen away.

At Lymington they suffered a long delay, for the cars seeking to cross over to the Island were all too many for the means of transport. But at last, squeezed into a barge with four other motors, and accompanied by a second barge containing yet five more, they pursued their way to Yarmouth, and there, for the first time, saw before them a visible sign of War. Later, sentries in khaki with fixed bayonets were to become the most familiar of sights, but Dad and Roddy first saw them on the landing-place at Yarmouth, and on the bridge, so greedy of tolls, that they crossed on the road to Colwell Bay. Even then, though they knew it not, Germany had struck at France and entered Luxembourg, and had declared war on Russia. Even then England, her mobilized Fleet already in secret movement,

had called up the Naval Reserves, and was busy issuing calls to the Army and the Territorials to be ready for instant action. But anything less like a great country on the brink of war than that road by which they had come, and that Island—save only for the sentries and their gleaming steel—could not have been conceived by any flight of imagination. We tell of what we saw.

Mother and Little Jane had arrived, and in their old pleasant quarters of a year before, they settled down for the week-end which remained before Dad, in movement once more, must rush back to the North and take up his sadly neglected duties.

The next morning, Sunday, brought before them the positive fact of War, for the newspapers, freed from the shrieking hysteria of surmise, settled down with gravity to tell of fact. No exaggeration was now possible. Germany had, on that peaceful First of August of the journey down, struck the long-prepared blow, and now, on the Sunday, Europe was at War. And with the definite fact came a curious sense of relief. No longer were the minds of men and women harassed by long-drawn-out doubts and fears and hopes. The worst had happened, and the worst in experience is never so overwhelming as in anticipation. To the strong the worst is a bracing summons to effort, to the weak

it is a numbing relaxation of agitated nerves. We have never experienced the thrills of impending bankruptcy, but we have been assured by those who have known them, and have passed into the pit of insolvency, that the fall is a blessed relief after the terrified trembling on the brink. Responsibility has ceased. No longer need the poor bankrupt struggle against destiny, his fate has passed from his own weak hands into those strong ones of the Official Receiver, and his racked mind knows the blessing of sleep. So it was with all of us on Sunday, August the second. The racking agony of those days of doubt, anticipation, and fears were over. Destiny had delivered its all-powerful verdict, from which there was no appeal; War had come upon us, and our minds were at peace. War was now our task also, our only task, and we bent ourselves to it, quiet, enduring, and unafraid. Upon that Sunday, when the church bells pealed, the sun shone, and England appeared to the material eye to be wholly unchanged, was born the New Spirit which was after all the Old Spirit that had underlain all our levity and trifling, the old spirit of unconquerable Britain.

Big Peter and Tony arrived the same evening. Dad had proved, in this instance, to be a true prophet; their camping-ground had been needed for the concentration of the Expeditionary Force, about to rush to the

aid of France, and the Boys had been cast upon the world. Big Peter was a very interesting study. At one moment he would have the grave, set face of one who immolates self upon the Altar of Duty, at another his eyes would gleam and his lips twitch at thoughts of the glorious rag which the Army in wartime offered for his entertainment. He would talk gravely, solemnly, of the responsibilities which lay before the manhood of England—*quorum pars magna fuit*—and at the next instant would turn aside and chuckle gruffly in the depths of his great stomach. Tony, whose usually bright face had taken on a cast of immovable gloom, bitterly resented the privileged age of his big brother and the heedlessness of parents who had not had the decent sense to bring him into the world at an earlier date. By no stretch of casuistry could his fifteen years be extended to bring him within the military limits of age. It was beautiful to see the haughty sympathy with which Big Peter addressed his scowling junior, and the condescension of his assurance that there was work at hand even for kids to do. Dad, who enjoyed inexpressibly the comedy of the brothers, found it difficult to maintain that gravity which was proper to so solemn a national and family crisis. He longed to laugh, and with hearty blows upon Big Peter's back to call upon him to come off the roof. He would

catch the eye of Peter, during one of his moments of boyish exultation, and would silently gurggle to see the instant veiling of the light and the resumption of that noble air, suggestive of Don Quixote and Joan of Arc, which the youth desired to maintain before the world.

The Boys were weary after their long, circuitous journey, for the railway-lines were already, on that Sunday, congested by troop-trains, but refreshed by an ample supper, they fell into talk, and revealed the secret thoughts of their hearts.

"Dad," observed Big Peter, with portentous gravity, "I suppose, there is no doubt that England will do her duty in this war?"

"None at all, my son," cried Dad. "You may safely bet your biggest boots on that."

Big Peter frowned; his father's levity of expression did not fit with his mood of the moment, which was that of heroic self-sacrifice.

"We all owe a duty to civilization which must on no account be shirked," he proclaimed.

"How can one help shirking when one is only a beastly fifteen?" growled Tony from the depths of his jealous fury.

"My dear Peter," said Dad, smiling into the cold, grave eyes of his big son, "you

won't shirk." Big Peter flushed, and between the two men passed a long look of complete understanding.

"Good old Dad, you were always a decent sort!" he said at last. "So it is all right?"

"Quite all right. You needn't worry about us."

"And Mother?" he asked anxiously.

"Tell her," said Dad.

"What is that you have to tell me, Peter boy?" asked Mother. "It is splendid to get you back so soon. Poor Dad goes off to-morrow, but I shall not mind so much now that I have you."

Big Peter gulped for a moment and then spoke up. "Mother, you won't have me for long. I must join the Army soon. Dad knows and approves."

"What—the Army—you, my little Peter?" Her voice trailed away, her thoughts flashed back, as Dad's had done, to the little curly-haired boy, their firstborn, who, before they realized the change, had grown into a man; her face went white as chalk. Big Peter patted her hand, and Dad looked anywhere rather than at his wife's face. The shock was bitter, but recovery was almost instantaneous—a few seconds, though God only knows what Mother thought during those brief seconds, which for her seemed to cover a lifetime.

"I see, of course," she said quietly, and

brought herself to smile into the anxious eyes of Big Peter. "I had forgotten that you are a man. In these days men must be—men. Tell us all about it, Peter dear!"

The big youth gave a deep sigh of relief, shed instantly all his solemn airs and became the eager boy intent to do the work of a man.

"You dear creatures! The thought of you both has oppressed me all day and kept me awake for quite an hour last night. I might have known how you would take it." He grasped Mother's hand and the two sat through the conversation which followed, pressing one another's hands, linked by the bonds of complete sympathy and understanding. "Of course I must join, and as soon as possible. You see, I am a trained man, with four years of the O.T.C., and they would take me at once in a first line battalion."

"As a private?" put in Dad.

"Yes. One cannot do better nowadays than be an efficient private soldier. I am not sufficiently trained for anything else, even if they would have me, but I am a marksman, a first-class signaller, and a tolerable engineer. They would take me as a private at once."

Dad, who had been thinking over the problem of Big Peter for the past two days, here delivered judgment, and the others hung upon his words.

“ This is going to be a war of armies on a Continental scale. Our little force of Regulars will be swallowed up in the huge turmoil within a few weeks and we shall have to make a big new army for service in France. The Territorials will go as soon as the Fleet has done its work, which won't take long. Our Fleet is mobilized, the Germans are on a peace footing, we have caught them nodding for once, and within a week the German Navy will have been sunk or blockaded. Even in the South African War we raised many battalions of Volunteers, and I expect that we shall do the same thing on a large scale for this war. Of course you must serve, Peter boy, but I want you to serve so that the country may have the full use of your head as of your big body. So for the moment I say: wait. Come home to the North with Mother and the others at the end of this week and then, if, as I expect, special battalions are raised for the war, I will get you a commission. That is what you and the like of you will be wanted for—as officers of the new forces which are to save the civilization of Europe.”

“ A commission !” cried Peter joyously. “ Can you really do this wonderful thing ?”

“ A commission !” growled Tony. “ Oh, you lucky, lucky beast !”

“ That will give me a week of you, at any rate,” murmured Mother.

"I can do it, I think. Vast numbers of young officers will be needed, and you, Peter, a sergeant of O.T.C., will be of the kind required. So wait, old man. Enjoy yourself for a few days, drive Jitny back with Tony, and leave the rest to me."

"If you can do what you say I will leave it to you gladly. Even if you fail I can always enlist. I will wait."

"Good!" cried Dad. "So that is settled."

Then Tony spoke up, wrathfully. "All this is very fine for Peter; everybody thinks only of Peter. He's your beastly favourite, I know. But what about me?"

"But, Tony," explained Mother, "you're only fifteen!"

"There are lots of boys of less than fifteen in the Navy."

"But you are not in the Navy," observed Dad.

"No, I am not, worse luck. You people don't seem to have thought of anything. You might have put me into the Navy years ago if you had had any gumption. Now I am too old for the Navy and too young for the Army. It is perfectly sickening!"

Dad scratched his head, and tears of pride at her Boys stood in Mother's eyes.

"I have been reckoning it out," went on Tony, "and there may be a chance for me

if this war lasts for two years. I hope to goodness that it will."

"Two years!" groaned Mother. "How awful!"

"Jolly fine," cried Tony, brightening. "By then I could, if I swotted hard at school, pass into the Navy Pay Department—I am too old for the Osborne business and much too young for the Public School cadetships. But there is a chance in the Pay Department."

"But what use would that be?" inquired Dad, wondering. "It is a non-combatant branch, and you strike me as being a bit of a fire-eater."

"I am thinking," concluded Tony, "that if I could get on a ship somehow I could volunteer for the Flying Corps, and there I should be—made for life!"

"Or for death," groaned Mother. "Oh, you poor dear boy! You break my heart, but I am glad, ever so glad, to have it broken. The Flying Corps! Oh Tony, Tony——" She fell silent, and so remained, one of the first of England's mothers to know that awful brooding silence which the War has brought upon them. Men will talk freely of their sons on service, but the women are silent, their thoughts are too deep for speech. "I have four sons," said a friend to us last year, "and they are all at the front." "What

does their mother say?" we inquired rather stupidly. "Their mother? She is like the other mothers now. She says nothing, but God alone knows what she thinks." We met our friend again some months later, two of his sons had been killed, the others were still at the front. He had aged ten years, but talked proudly of his boys, of those who were dead and of those who still lived. "How is their mother?" we inquired, for she was one whom we loved. "She says nothing," was the reply. She had lost two sons, she might lose the two who remained, yet she said nothing—but God alone knows what she thought!

"If the War lasts two years," said Dad, "you shall do as you please. That is, if any of us are alive by then."

"Great business!" cried Tony joyfully. "When I am sailing about in the Naval Wing of the Flying Corps, Peter, and you are grubbing in the mud below, you will be jolly sick!"

"Not half so sick as you will be, my son," grimly retorted Peter.

The next morning, at breakfast, the younger children were told of the plans of their brothers.

"If Peter joins the Army," cried Little Jane, "and Tony joins the Navy, what are you going to join, Wee Roddy?"

“ I am not going to join anything,” emphatically pronounced that sage. “ If Peter goes into the Army, and Tony goes into the Navy, I shall have to go into business to make the money which is to keep them both.”

CHAPTER VIII

LIEUTENANT PETER

THE wonderful thing was done, and in the doing did not prove to be so very difficult. Before August had drawn to a close, Big Peter had received a provisional appointment as full Lieutenant in a newly raised battalion of Highland Infantry. His splendid physique and no less conspicuous intelligence, his claim to be a "trained man" among the countless thousands of the untrained, his athletic record, and the professional military air which he could assume at will—an air which afterwards gained for him the soubriquet of "The Brigadier"—impressed themselves favourably upon commanding officers on the search for promising subalterns. It happened, indeed, that Dad's efforts—exerted in several influential quarters—resulted in Peter being gazetted in successive weeks as Lieutenant in two different battalions, and one commission had to be given up, to the inexpressible disgust of Wee Roddy. For that careful youth—who had already assumed the future financial responsibility of maintaining both Peter and

Tony, in addition to the provision of the Hampshire cottage and twelve acres of land for Mother and Dad—was aghast at the reckless casting away of so much Army pay. He agreed that even Peter, big though he was, could not serve in two battalions simultaneously, but he was with difficulty convinced that he could not, by some exercise of duplicity, draw two subalterns' pay. He was shaken, and not a little embarrassed, when Dad pointed out that to draw two pays for the discharge of one duty was not quite up to that high standard of business probity which Wee Roddy had voluntarily assumed for his own guidance during his forthcoming ascent of the Millionaire ladder, and at last reluctantly gave his consent to the resignation of the second commission, when assured by Dad that if one lieutenant drew the pay of two lieutenants he would suddenly and ignominiously cease to be even one. It could hardly be assumed with safety, remarked Dad, that the War Office, notoriously incompetent and blind though it was, would fail to discover, when it came to paying for their services, that there were not two Big Peters but one Big Peter. So Peter remained with the original battalion of his choice, and Roddy had to content himself with the reflection that his big brother might have done worse—he might have been only a Second Lieutenant with a shilling a day less

of pay than that which his agents now proudly drew for him.

But while the two stars on Peter's sleeves, implying, as they did, so many useful daily shillings, gave some comfort to Wee Roddy, they brought nothing but chagrin to the wretched Tony. Before he returned to school, Tony had the unspeakable misery of seeing his big and envied brother in the full service uniform of his rank and regiment, and not even his own unofficial appointment—though he stretched its importance to breaking point—as chauffeur to a real Army Colonel—"a pukka Colonel, not a beastly temporary," as he put it—gave him complete consolation. "Peter," he remarked sourly, "looks a loathsome ass in a cut-away Scottish tunic and a kid's Glengarry bonnet, without even a kilt to excuse them. He needs only top-boots and spurs to look a perfect fool." But perhaps Tony's views upon the *tenue* of a non-kilted Scottish battalion were slightly jaundiced. We are sure that he would have detested Big Peter even more intensely had he appeared *aux jupons*.

Tony's responsibilities as chauffeur to the pukka Colonel—a post to which he had appointed himself—were discharged with efficiency and punctuality. Early each morning, during the holidays which yet remained to him, clad in the khaki of his school Corps, he drove Jitny to his kindly patron's lodging

and conveyed that officer swiftly and safely to the outlying barracks where his duties lay. There Tony would spend the greater part of the morning, acting as extra orderly (unpaid) to the C.O., who, loving the bright-faced boy, humoured his military zeal, and invented for him numberless small errands, all of which he discharged with the air of a Staff Officer. The slightest hint from his exalted friend was to the boy the most sacred of Orders, and no stress of weather or of other distractions could turn him aside from the faithful execution of his self-imposed tasks. He made, indeed, a gallant effort to prevail upon the C.O. to commandeer the services both of Jitny and himself "in the King's name," remarking, to give point to his suggestion, that this course would involve his removal from school and his definite absorption into the military machine. At that time we were all impressed daily by the sight of horses, waggons, motor cars, and anything else of use, being suddenly commandeered for the Army's requirements. The Colonel observed that this exercise of supreme power, much as it fell within his own wishes, would not really be to Tony's interest, since it would cut him off from all chance of passing into the Navy Pay Department and of volunteering two years hence for the Flying Corps, and would remove him definitely from the firing-lines. "I only wish, old man,"

said the pukka Colonel, "that I could exchange my crown and stars for your youth; I am nothing but an ancient Artillery 'dug-out,' stuck away in a depot to dry-nurse recruits. That is all they think I am good for, while you——"

So Tony reluctantly, sadly, went back to school, promising that he would resume his duties as chauffeur the moment that he was allowed to return to the North. Which promise he faithfully kept. For Tony, though he had only fifteen years, was a "trained man."

For a few days Peter marched about the city, trailing a motley regiment in heterogeneous mufti, and then disappeared to a camp at the sea-coast where the newly raised battalion was to be clothed, fed, and faithfully hammered into the semblance of a military unit.

"We have not done badly, my dear," remarked Dad to Mother. "We might even regard ourselves as exceptionally fortunate. It will take six months, at least, to make that material—good as it is—into anything like a battalion which an inspecting officer would pass for active service. By that time the War will probably be over."—We all talked like that in those days.—"We shall have offered up our Isaac and, like Abraham, shall be let off the delivery of the goods."

"But if the War is not over in six months' time?"

“Then we shall be no worse off than all the other middle-aged parents whose value at this moment is measured solely by the number of sons, willing and fit for service, which they can lay upon their country’s altar. I have of late suffered a lesson in humility,” went on Dad reflectively, “which will last me my life. A month ago I thought myself a person of some consequence in the Divine Order of things, but now I realize with pain that my intrinsic value is infinitely less than that of the rawest recruit in Big Peter’s very raw platoon.”

“I do not agree,” retorted Mother, with indignation. “You have a great position.”

“I had—a month ago. Now my position, such as it is, has no worth to the country except as a means of ekeing out Big Peter’s exiguous pay and of educating and training up the younger boys for their coming share in England’s work. If you don’t believe me we will ask Peter, when we next meet him, and abide by his candid and plain-spoken judgment. But I warn you that it will be very unflattering.”

At that time Dad encouraged Mother to cast herself with energy into the pursuit of the many relief works—useful in their various ways, but chiefly of service in our early troubles as a means of distracting the minds of otherwise impotent men and women, and of making them think, at any rate, that they

were bearing some small share of the country's burdens. Dad suffered intensely in those early months. His easy, humorous code of philosophy, which had served him so well through the rough path of life, had been rent from him and stamped in the mud of war. He saw himself as he really was—a miserable pleasure-lover, a laughing philosopher, the type of *intellectuel* bred by long years of peace and of little or no use in the stress of war. He saw himself and his like as not only a noxious futility in the present, but actually as largely responsible in the past for the calamity which had overwhelmed Europe. He had been blind because he would not see. We like to believe that this poor fellow, had he been ten years younger and had succeeded in cajoling a complacent doctor to pass him as fit, would have himself enlisted and striven to blot out in active service the errors of a misspent life. But this relief was denied him. He was compelled to go on living, to go on with the futile tasks which Fate had set him, and to struggle through a long phase of utter self-loathing. Of course the phase passed. But for a long time, for him, he lay in the mud. Then he sat up, scrambled to his feet, brushed his clothes, and actually came to believe that there was little mud left upon his person. But the experience of humiliation had been salutary. Never again would he be quite his old, complacent self,

never again would he regard his Boys as pale emanations from his own shining personality. Always afterwards he would recognize that they belonged to a more strenuous self-sacrificing age than that in which he had spent his own youth; always would he recognize that they were as worthy of their age and generation as he was unworthy of his own. He had changed with the new, changed world, and never would be quite the same again.

Though the camp where Big Peter dwelt with his men in tents was not far away, Dad refrained from journeying thither for a full month. He wished to give the young officer time to swell to the measure of his opportunities—and incidentally of his two-starred uniform—before paying a visit of inspection. In the meantime Tony and Roddy had gone back to school. Wee Roddy suffered the usual temporary lapse from his habitual serenity of soul, but was speedily comforted by the gift of a whole library of War Books, those remarkable productions which were then bursting in a hastily improvised flood from the printing-presses. Never had Roddy been gratified by the prospect of so unstinted a debauch of indigestible learning. Tony, torn from his pukka Colonel, also departed in low spirits, though for him school had no terrors. He was somewhat cheered by the reflection that by adopting a severely military

manner, and by continuously wearing his uniform, he might pass among the uncritical civilians of London as an accomplished private of the New Army. By this pardonable device he hoped, and, indeed, succeeded beyond expectation, in attracting to himself some of the light of public admiration, which at that time was poured out lavishly upon our new defenders. His critical mind, distressed at the lack of precise military training, plainly discernible in young temporary officers—including, in his view, even Big Peter himself—was already dwelling upon the composition of that illuminating handbook which a year later he was to complete and publish to the world.

It is a surprising truth that not only did Tony compose quite a good book, but had little difficulty in persuading grave military publishers of its merits, and in passing it off as the work—to quote one serious reviewer—“of a skilful officer, keen after perfection in every detail of his duties.” He carried on all the business negotiations himself, astutely acting in person as the “orderly” of the “skilful officer” who modestly preferred to veil his light in the background. Thus at sixteen, though forbidden to wield the sword, Tony was privileged to place his mightier pen at the service of his country.

When Dad, accompanied by Mother,

arrived at the seaside camp of a fine October day, they stumbled against Big Peter, who was to be observed marching proudly at the head of a gang of dissolute convicts in blue pyjamas. This spectacle, at first not a little startling, did not greatly gratify the visitors, but closer inspection resolved the convicts into young and healthy men, whose innocent faces robbed their garb of its criminal suggestiveness. It appeared that economy, or the scarcity of khaki cloth, had condemned the battalion to a costume utterly revolting to the most cheerful and least artistic spirit. The blue pyjamas must have been a bitter sight to the womenfolk, who swarmed about the camp on that Saturday afternoon, and to whose arms the gallant wearers were soon dismissed.

Peter, also released from duty, approached Mother and Dad, stopped at the regulation distance, and saluted. Then he remained immovable at attention. Dad, feeling like a general officer, raised his hat. Mother reflected that so inhumanly martial a figure could not possibly be kissed. One might as well embrace a statue of von Hindenburg.

"You seem," observed Dad, critically examining the tanned and clear-eyed young man, "to be bigger than ever, if that be possible. A month ago you were bulky but soft, now you look as hard as nails. I should

scarcely have expected so much difference in so short a time."

"Swedish drill, sir," replied the motionless automaton.

"Yes, and the open air, and the early hours, and the constant exercise, and the very big purpose at the back which inspires it all. You have aged quite a lot during the last month, Lieutenant Peter!"

"I feel years older, sir."

"They have been good years. You were a boy; now you are a man, one who knows his place in the world and exactly how to fill it. Lucky man. You are having the time of your life. Make the most of it."

"I do, every minute, sir."

"That is very nice. We are delighted to see you, but we should be a shade more comfortable if you could unbend a little, 'stand easy,' and forget for a while the immense moral height by which you, a King's officer, overtop us poor middle-aged civilians. Could you, by taking thought, relax your military severity and show us your quarters?"

Big Peter laughed, and the boy's gay spirit peeped for an instant from the man's grave eyes. "You are the same dry old stick, Dad," he said. "The war hasn't changed you much!"

"More than you think, perhaps. Show Mother your tent, old man, and help her to

worry herself delightfully over your primitive domestic arrangements."

Big Peter, no longer an automaton, put his arm through Mother's and led her away to the officers' lines, while Dad sought out his old friend, the Colonel of the battalion.

"Is all well with the boy?" he asked anxiously. "Tell me the truth, old friend, spare me nothing which needs be told, but remember that his success is now all that stands between me and moral damnation. Is all well with the boy?"

The Colonel stared for a moment at the trembling lips of his hitherto light-hearted friend, wondering at the gust of emotion which shook him, and then wrung his hand.

"Have no fears for the boy," cried he heartily. "He is the best of all my youngsters. I admit that at first I thought him too young for the job, for I stupidly judged by the calendar. But now I know better. That infant of yours is as old in head and heart as the Major yonder. He has read everything and thought of everything; he is the captain of his own soul and the father and mother of his men. He spares them no more than he spares himself, yet I really believe that, but for the frowns of the sergeant-major, he would tuck them up every night in their beds. And yet careful and considerate of them though he is, there is not a man, the most reckless, who dares to play tricks

with him. His platoon is already the smartest in my battalion, and he drills them like a Prussian martinet. Have no fears for him; he is a devil of a boy, that long-legged youngster of yours."

"He is my first, the only one I can give," muttered Dad brokenly.

"And a devilish good first, too!" cried the Colonel.

The men chatted for a few minutes of other things, and it was the old, cheerful Dad who presently rejoined his wife and big son at the tent where they sat upon crazy chairs, laughing gaily together. Having given freely of her flesh and blood, Mother grudged not the gift nor wished it restored. She lived now in the present; Peter was safe for several months, and she resolved not to anticipate the anxieties of the future.

"I wanted to go through the men's lines," she said, "but Peter forbade me in the rudest fashion. He declared that they were off duty cuddling their women, and he would not have their little *amours* disturbed by the intrusion of an officer. 'Their arms are better employed than in saluting me,' he said. At his age he oughtn't to know about such things!"

"Never forget," cried Dad sententiously, "that the new generation begins where we leave off. It is born equipped with all the experience of the ages. I always seat myself

humbly at the feet of my children to learn from them. We live tremendously quickly nowadays, and our children are as much in advance of us, both intellectually and morally, as we are in advance of the Early Victorians. As for Peter there, he is a god. The Colonel has been telling me such wonderful things of him."

"The Colonel is a dear old ass," observed Peter disrespectfully, "and loves us all. He will talk any kind of rot about us, especially to a silly old man like you, who never knows when his leg is being pulled."

"This is quite like old times!" cried Dad happily. "Big Peter, standing at attention and filially respectful, I can't abide, but his rudeness comes like refreshing rain in the desert. At the age of four you likened us to a pair of Gorgons, and you have kept up that intimate note ever since. Now, Peter, I can always depend upon you for candour. Lend me your ears and act as umpire between Mother and me. Answer. If I offered myself as a recruit in your platoon would you accept of my services?"

"Heavens, no!" replied Peter bluntly. "You would be like a most disreputable old patch on a nice new pair of breeches."

"There you have it, Mother," cried Dad, delighted. "The cold copper-bottomed truth from the mouth of an expert. I told you that my worth in the world was infinitely less than

that of the rawest of his recruits, and he endorses my verdict with emphasis."

"As a soldier you would, of course, be absurd, a thing to cry over," went on Peter, "but even in war-time civilians like you must be of some account. Not much, perhaps, but some. They can make guns, and shells, and uniforms, quite a lot of things most useful to Us. It is true that you only make——"

"Hush, my son! Keep my disreputable trade a deep secret. But can you, who know it, pretend that it contains a particle of worth for the country in strenuous days like these?"

"To be frank, I can't. Just now it seems to be the most futile occupation on God's earth."

"My views to a hair!" cried Dad, laughing. "But Mother will have it that I am still some sort of a potentate. The truth is that we, who a month or two ago fancied ourselves not a little, have been chucked down upon the hard earth with the nastiest of bumps. We flourished in peace, but war finds us wanting in every quality of usefulness. My wretched fate is that of hundreds of thousands whose incompetence was concealed by the machinery which they handled. Take away the machinery and we are like outcasts upon a desert island, where to live or to die depends upon personal resource. War is a remorse-

less leveller. Only those who are trained to the work of service then paramount—or are young and fit enough to be so trained—are of the smallest account in the new order. We others are mere lumber and worse, for we are *les bouches inutiles*. We are consumers, not producers. Those only are now happy whose work is so plain and essential a duty that the country would be manifestly weaker by the loss of them. That is the simple touchstone of merit. We other unhappy devils are realizing that if we were snuffed out to-morrow and cast into the pit, the country would be stronger for the loss of us; not weaker, you see, but actually stronger, for we are now the devourers of her substance, the parasitic growths of peace. A little while ago and I hated war, now I am coming to regard it as the Purge of God.”

“My dear,” snapped Mother, “you make me furious with such talk. It is utter nonsense and wicked nonsense, for you don’t really believe a word that you say. Where would the Boys be in the future, without you?”

“Thou hast said it, woman,” said Dad, smiling rather sadly. “It is not I that am of value but only the Boys. My worth to the country is precisely what you suggest—as the parent and supporter of the Boys. In myself I am a negative encumbrance.”

“Well, old fellow,” said Peter, “even on

your own valuation you haven't much to grumble at. You might have been childless. As it is, you have three quite respectable sons and a daughter who is resolved to have in her turn a boy, a girl, and a baby, whether she be married or not. So you are secure, and your seed unto the second and third generation shall rise up and call you blessed."

"True," replied Dad, laughing. "Peter is always right, Mother. We might have been childless, and, good God, what would our feelings have been then? In the words of Little Jane; true words: I am a silly old man. I may be a cumberer of the ground, but there is no need for me also to be an ass. So tell us of your new life, Peter, and be hanged to my troubles. How do you like the training?"

"It is simply wonderful!" cried Peter, with enthusiasm. "I came down here thinking I knew something of my business, but am kept mighty busy concealing my ignorance. I have learned enough now to discover how much remains to be learned even by mud-plugging footmen. As for the men, it is extraordinary to watch them. Six weeks ago they were just lumps, no discipline, townies of the silly, chattering type with which our country has been cursed in millions. Now every day they grow into the likeness of men, real men in body and heart and mind. One can see them expand like those

flowers in the cinema, which compress a month of growth into five minutes on a screen."

"If we could train all our people like this in times of peace, what a splendid thing it would be for the future of the race!" said Dad.

"Splendid!" agreed Peter. "Yet, just now, the immediate purpose revolts me. I would risk the lives of professional soldiers without any compunction, but it is a horrid business to turn all these civilians into fine men and then to throw the finished product into the slaughter-pit."

"Yet," remarked Dad, "if it were not for the war, and the grand purpose inspired by the war, you would not have had the men to train, nor would they have thrown their hearts into the training. They won't all be killed, thank Heaven, and those that remain will leaven the mass of our countrymen. You can't have it both ways. You cannot have the keenness and spirit of self-sacrifice inspired by war, without war as the dominating motive."

"I suppose not. But I hate war, and so do all our mess, I think. I love the work, and hope that I shall remain a soldier, but I would willingly give my own life if I could save my splendid men from the filthy killing business. Yet, nowadays, nothing else counts but just that."

“Your imagination is too active, old man. It does not do in these days to think over-much. We must concentrate on the immediate purpose, and console ourselves with the reflection that the majority of our men will survive and be infinitely the better for the fires which will burn away their dross. Take your own case. Your path is very straight and clear, and can be pursued without much introspection. It is to serve your country and to give your life, if need be. But it is also to keep your life, if that be possible, with honour, for her service in the future. A careless and thoughtless risking of life is in these days the worst of crimes—it is a wicked stupidity.”

“I quite agree,” said Peter, “and that is the spirit of all our instruction. But I also feel sometimes that I ought to have enlisted and gone out at once instead of taking a commission and spending many months here in safety. I am doing good work, it is true, but should I not have done better at the front with a rifle?”

“Most emphatically no!” said Dad. “I am quite clear on that point. The country wants the best of all of us, and your best, old man, is your head, not your hands, big and capable though they are. Every month which you spend here, or elsewhere, in real hard training for what is a highly scientific business—not of merely killing one’s foes but of saving civilization from the works of the

Devil—makes you more and more valuable. It takes not months but years to make a real leader of men, and that, if you survive, is what I would see you. Life is the difficult thing, Death by comparison is easy. Your business is to live for your country, and to throw all your brains and energies into living worthily. If I had my way, I would dedicate such men as you to the great work of building up the England of the future. I would keep you in training for years, even at the cost of denying you actual fighting in this war, in order that we might have at the end of it a splendid reserve of our very best to do the tremendous work to which we shall then have to set our hands. It is the most shocking of waste to throw away our boys until they have reached the true stature of their capacities.”

“*Ars longa, vita brevis !*” commented Peter. “And an infantry subaltern at present has a mighty short *vita*, after he gets into the firing-lines. The authorities have even now some inkling of this idea of yours of provision for the future. Some of our best are being stuck away in reserve camps, to train men and send them out, to train and to send out, but never to go themselves, though they eat out their hearts. It is cruel for them, but the authorities are right, beyond a doubt.”

“If it happens, old man, that you become one of these you will eat out your heart, I

know, for I can see that you hanker desperately to be at work yonder instead of here; but if you are ordered to stay, you may take it as sure that the service to which you will have been called is more important to your country than that other service which you long for. Whatever happens, I shall be well content. Whether at home or at the front, you will give of your best. Whether you live to fight another day as a supremely qualified leader of men, or whether as a raw apprentice you are ordered to give what you can in service or in life itself, I shall be content, and so will poor Mother here. Don't forget that it is always worse for her than for us. We can talk freely and laugh even in the face of the most frightful of risks. But she who bore you cannot talk or laugh, she can only think."

Peter took Mother's hand and kissed it. He said nothing and she said nothing, but those two, of one flesh, understood one another without words.

"Now," cried Dad, "we have had enough of this talk. Let us regale ourselves with tea. Talk is good, and I am a happier man than I have felt for weeks past, but tea and buttered toast, a grand greasy mess of sopping butter, are very much better."

As they walked towards the house where they proposed to have tea, Dad noticed the lines of two other battalions, and pointed

them out to Mother. "They mount up," said he. "Here we have three thousand men, all with one thought, all bent upon making of themselves the best possible."

"That is true of Ours," cried Peter, "but you flatter these others most outrageously. We shall in three months be a battalion instead of a mob, and in six months be fit to fight beside the Guards. But these others in six years will be no better than a mob. They are a clumsy, flat-footed lot of useless louts, and the officers, my sacred aunt! are nothing but O.T.C. rabbits."

This delightful speech cheered Dad immensely; it revealed the boyish heart of Peter in all its old luxuriance. It thrilled with that pride of caste which goes to make a school, or a college, or a regiment very real and vital things. "We are It!" Already Dad had conversed intimately with multitudes of officers and men of the New Army, and he had never yet met one, officer or man, who did not proclaim that his own battalion, or company, or platoon, was It, the one bright spot in an intolerable expanse of blackness, the one really competent unit buried amidst a ghastly mass of universal incompetence. "You must not judge the others by Us," they all proclaimed. "For we are It, the Real Thing! The others are fit for nothing but to be disbanded incontinently."

Over the tea and buttered toast—in which Dad wallowed joyously; he was a simple soul—the talk became lighter and Peter told of some of his experiences.

“One of my sergeants,” said he, “is an old friend, the laundry man whose motor van I used to annex and drive about the city. We have had great sport together scores of times in the holidays, he ladling out the baskets of clothes while I played the chauffeur. It was first-class driving practice. The Laundry Man is about thirty-five, married, served in the old Volunteers under the Colonel, and was one of the first to join Us. He tells me that he was glad to join. He is fond of his wife and children, but the camp is a blessed change after married life. Quite half our men are married. Do you know, Dad, it strikes me that marriage is not exactly a popular institution?”

Dad laughed. “I am afraid it isn’t. This war has revealed many things which we were too blind to see till they were thrust under our noses. There are not many married men, after ten years of so-called matrimonial blessedness, who would not be thankful for less blessing and more freedom.”

“And what of the wives?” cried Mother. “I have been working among them. Most of them have told me that they drove their

husbands to the recruiting office because, with the allowances, they could get on much better without them. They also welcome a change, and possibly more than the men do, for marriage presses more heavily on women than on men."

"This is perfectly awful!" said Dad, laughing. "It is the crumbling of our most sacred British tradition. But I am really not a bit surprised. Even with the help of a substantial income, the support of a wife and children is a dour, weary business at best; when the income is small, as with most of your men, it must be purgatory. The same weary round, the same faces every day, however much we may love them, the heavy, remorseless chains which bind 'till Death us do part'—these things, my dear, are the very Devil at the best."

"I will tell you a deep secret," observed Mother. "There are very few women, who have been ten years married, who would not gladly leave their husbands and even their children for a year or so if they could be sure of coming back after the blessed holiday. I have felt that way myself often and often. Married people ought always to make a habit of separating for several weeks every year. We can do it, but the others with very small incomes can't. I am very, very sorry for them."

"This is most instructive," cried Peter. "Marriage is the only romance which most people get, and it seems to be rather a disappointment. Like Wee Roddy and Little Jane, I am coming to believe that the family is the thing and the partner a necessary but highly undesirable incumbrance."

"So the war would seem to be demonstrating on a grand scale. But you needn't worry, Peter. Marriage won't come your way for many a long year."

"Another of my men, a young private, is a writer for the technical papers," observed Peter, "who was delighted to change his job. Lots of others are clerks, shopmen, porters, and so on, with no prospects, who have just flown into the Army to get away from the dreary round of our indescribably dull civilization. For it must be beastly dull for the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. The writing man knows you. You took him out once on Jitny to show off a startling improvement which had taken your exuberant fancy. He was rather taken with the idea, so he told me."

"I remember him. I talked and talked, how I talked! Then I got out and demonstrated. It was a great day for me, but he, poor devil, must have been bored to distraction."

"Still it was a real improvement. Jitny

is a very live thing now. Tony and I brought her up from the Isle of Wight, after you left, in three days, and we came round by London, up the Great North Road, and then across to the North by Carlisle. We did about 180 miles a day. It was a grand run. How is Jitny, the dear thing? I miss her frightfully."

"She is better than ever, and, I verily believe, misses you. She is a live thing who loves us as much as we do her. When I pat her broad back she purrs like a cat, and I have almost come to putting cream into the petrol tank. When her inside was a bit disarranged I did, literally, put castor oil into the lubricator of the engine, and it worked like a charm. Jitny is not a bit cattish in disposition, though she purrs like one. She is more like a fond mother, and looks upon us as her dear but erring children."

"I believe that you two love Jitny more than you do me!" cried Mother.

"Not more, but differently. Her virtues supplement yours, and we love you both for the blessings which you bring upon us. We should be poor lost things without the pair of you."

"Well, that is something," replied Mother. "I am highly flattered to be ranked on the same plane with Jitny, though it has seemed to be more than once that I had fallen out

of sight and mind. Oh, I have been horribly jealous of Jitny, I can tell you."

"Don't you have more to do with women than you can help, Peter boy. Stick to motors, they are more dependable."

"I will," said Peter, with emphasis.

"Detestable creatures!" cried Mother. But Dad smiled upon her, for he knew that Mother, though she might proclaim her jealousy of their beloved Jitny, grudged them not a bit of her. She had torn out her heart for Big Peter, and would have given her skin for Dad. Mother was all right.

When Mother and Dad returned home that evening they found a letter from Wee Roddy awaiting them. Roddy's letters were of extreme brevity and very concrete. There was about them no subtlety of light and shade. "Dear Mother," he wrote, "I hear Peter is in camp. I hope he won't catch cold, for doctors cost a frightful lot of money. He can't afford doctors. Tony is writing a book. People get lots of money for books, so I hope that Tony will. The matron has bought a live sheep, and the boys say we shall now have kidneys for breakfast every morning. I like kidneys. Please get a hen and keep it in the back garden. Then I can have as many boiled eggs as ever I like without you having to pay for them."

From which it will appear that Wee Roddy's

studies in natural history had not kept pace with his other intellectual interests. The annual visits to the famous Farm had unhappily come to an end before he was old enough greatly to profit by them.

CHAPTER IX

SUPER-PATRIOTISM

“ O wad some Pow’r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us !
It wad frae mony a blunder free us
And foolish notion.”

ROBERT BURNS.

“ WELL, Lieutenant Peter, how goes the Highland battalion raised in a week by a Lowland city ?”

“ It is great,” replied Big Peter, removing his vast khaki overcoat and proudly eyeing the twin stars on its shoulder-straps. “ Most of the officers might have been at Westminster, and the Colonel is a very Bayard. The soil out of which they dug him must have been very rich. The soul of him would sweeten a Highland bog. Many of the officers have been at English public schools and English Universities, many more belong to large businesses with world-wide connections, which they have abandoned to serve with us. They are a beautiful lot. By the way, I have made a discovery. One of the mess, though quite a good fellow, is a queer animal, a sort of Scottish super-patriot. He actually believes that the Battle of Bannockburn was

the greatest event in history, and that literature began and ended with the poems of Robert Burns. I thought that sort of rot had no existence outside *Punch*."

"Not a bit of it," said Dad. "It is true that the super-patriot is almost an extinct fowl among educated Scotsmen, who have the same rational love of their country which we have of ours, but he flourishes exceedingly among the *bourgeoisie*. There was a National Revival, some forty years back, started by some subtle humourist who asserted that Scotsmen were getting too modest and retiring, and now local super-patriotism is taught in the schools. That is why all those here who can afford the expense send their sons to be educated in England."

"I don't wonder at it," observed Big Peter. "This man kindly sympathized with me for not being Scotch. He was good enough to say that it was not my fault; I couldn't help it. I thanked him heartily, and replied that, had choice been open to me, I would have elected to belong to some really modest people like the Germans."

"Bold man," said Dad, laughing. "I have often been asked if I do not wish that I were Scotch. Sublime, isn't it? I always reply gravely that all the world desires to be Scotch. Then we part in full content with one another. A delicate sense of humour does not go with super-patriotism."

"It does not. My man did not try to kill me as he would have been fully justified in doing. He sidled away, keeping a careful eye upon me, and consulted with some other officers as to the advisability of reporting my pro-German sentiments to the Colonel. He was dissuaded with difficulty. I heard all about it afterwards in mess, and, amid shouts of laughter, in which the Colonel joined, I was christened 'The Hun,' in ginger-ale. We are a simple mess. Whisky, soda, and ginger-ale. My tippie is ginger-ale."

"And your men? How do you get on with them?"

"The dears!" cried Peter enthusiastically. "We are the best of friends. They are keen as mustard at their work and I give them as much as even they can stomach. The other day the Colonel came up as I was drilling my platoon. It was raining hard, real West-coast rain. I called them to attention, and there they stood, not moving an eyelash, with the rain trickling down their noses, and led down their necks by the ribbons of those silly Glengarry bonnets. Those bonnets are smart for parade but all wrong for service. 'You have a smart platoon here,' said the old man. 'They are called Soft Goods, sir,' I answered, loudly for the men to hear—my men come mostly from city warehouses, hence their name; other platoons are called Bank, Insurance, Exchange, and so on—

‘but they are fine Hard Stuff.’ The Colonel smiled, and the platoon could have wept upon my neck. They couldn’t have made me any wetter if they had.”

“Not bad for a boy of eighteen.”

“You and Mother say that I am only eighteen,” remarked Peter, thoughtfully, “and I try to believe you. But just look at the bulk of me. It couldn’t have been done in the time.”

“Go on. I am interested in your Soft Goods platoon.”

“They are Scots to a man. The fine flower of the city warehouses and local schools. What you say about super-patriotism reveals to me the source of some of their most useful qualities. For what is absurd and even harmful in an officer, to whom all the Allied peoples should be brothers, is uncommonly valuable in a man of the ranks. I suppose that all my bold buccaneers have been fed up on Bannockburn and ‘Scots wha hae.’ That explains many things which puzzled me. Why, for instance, they all firmly believe that the War is exclusively between Scotland and Germany. Their favourite newspapers, pink things which float about the camp in the afternoons, all seem to play up to this belief. Only Scottish regiments perform feats of valour, only Scotsmen receive honours, only Scotsmen are killed or wounded. One looks in vain in these

proud sheets for evidence that the English, Irish, or Welsh are concerned in the show at all. As for the French or the Russians, pouf! My men are all convinced that but for the Scottish regiments the whole of France would, ere this, have been overrun by the Bosches, and Paris levelled with the ground. They say so plainly in their weird language, of which I have picked up a few words. No matter that only some eight thousand Scots were then in France; it is quality that tells! They leavened the poor feckless English lump, and saved the chattering Frenchies from destruction. Scotland for Ever! This super-patriotism, which in a civilian spells conceit, self-sufficiency, and a human soul clean-swept of the saving grace of humour, becomes in a simple soldier the greatest of all military virtues. Let the poor dears think that the Scottish regiments dominate the whole War. They hold, I suppose, some three miles out of the thirty of the British front, and have no concern with the 420 miles of the French lines. But no matter. Let them think what they please, bless 'em! They will die in those three miles of trenches—and those other ten times three miles, when our New Army gets going—rather than be helped by the English, the Irish, the Welsh or the French.”

“You have insight, my son,” said Dad.
“He who would lead men must understand

them and love them. Let me tell you a little story. One of my people, a perfervid Scot—who had been reading a despatch from Sir John French—burst one morning into my room. He was white with rage, and the newspaper, containing the despatch, was in his hand. He cast it on the floor, stamped upon it, and bellowed: ‘This man, French, says that two Scottish regiments were driven from their trenches, and that he sent two English regiments to regain the ground which they had lost. He sent, he says, two English regiments to regain the ground lost by two Scottish ones! Mark the deep, calculated, slimy English meanness of the man who misuses his position so as to shame us. It was Our ground, had he none of Our regiments to send? No, he must deliberately plot to shame us like this, and then gleefully put it all in a despatch. Oh, it is infamous! I don’t believe a word of it. It was the English regiments which ran away, as they always do, and the Scottish regiments which retook the lost ground, as they always do. This frightful lie comes of having an Englishman to command a Scottish army!’ He jumped with both feet on the paper, dashed from my room, and slammed the door so that the furniture rocked. That, my son, is super-patriotism rampant. But, as you say, it is very splendid in soldiers, though confoundedly tiresome in civilians. I hope

that my violent friend will enlist soon. His energy is wasted at home."

"Do you know," remarked Peter reflectively, "I rather like that man. An ass, of course, but a very useful ass to have beside one in a tight place. The Empire needs that sort of spirit, though I could wish that it were a little less parochial. Your friend would sooner that the Scots lost a battle by themselves than gained one with the help of the English. In an officer that superlative patriotism would be most dangerous. My men are not, I think, quite so extreme. They will accept allies as a sort of humble bottle-holders so long as all the glory, the promotion, and the honours are kept exclusively for themselves. They're not greedy, not at all, only insistent upon their just rights." He laughed softly. "After all, Dad old man, it is rather fun living up here in the North among this strange people. It keeps one's sense of humour well polished."

"Yes," replied Dad. "But sometimes the polish gets a bit dull, and then, I confess, I do become a little weary."

"Poor old thing! Is it hankering after the Hampshire cottage? Stick it out, Dad. We shall not always be costing you a frightful lot of money, and there is always hope in Wee Roddy. He is eleven now, and going stronger than ever. To return. I have been thinking that brother Bosche, with his

‘Deutschland über alles,’ has just this super-patriotism which we have been discussing. It makes awful hogs of them, but think what seventy millions of super-patriots mean to the Great General Staff! What superlative gun-fodder! These Scots have something of the German spirit, though with them, thank Heaven, it has not developed into Teutonic frightfulness. They have the same uneasy self-consciousness, the same jealousy and suspicion of other nations, even of their own kindred. They have the same belief that they are the salt of the earth. ‘We are peerless,’ say the Germans. ‘We are Scots,’ say the Scots. It is the same self-centred idea.”

The door opened and a French friend of the family was shown in. He was an old cavalry man who, lamed years before by the kick of a horse, had been rejected for service. The conversation was then resumed in French, which language both Dad and Peter spoke passably well.

“Ah, Monsieur Peter, you are magnificent, immense! Too heavy for the light cavalry? Is it then the dragoons? No, a lieutenant of Highland Infantry? *Bons soldats, les Ecos-sais*. But you are not *un Ecossais*. *Vous êtes un sportsman anglais*. I love well the English, *mais les Ecossais*, I like them not. *C’est une race d’egoïstes, comme les Allemands*.”

“This is wonderful!” cried Dad. “The

same thought was in our minds when you entered."

"I do not speak of the *monde écossais, les instruits*. The upper and educated classes, the great business classes, of this cold land, are charming. A little stiff, perhaps, self-conscious, lacking in *l'esprit*, but hospitable to a fault, polite in a slow, careful fashion, considerate, altogether charming. My wife and I have many friends among *le monde* and *les instruits*. But there is, in this country, *une abîme*, a deep, impassable gulf, between the educated classes and *la bourgeoisie*. As for *les ouvriers, ce sont barbares, absolument barbares*. Where, in any country, calling itself civilized, would *le peuple, le gens de pays*, insult all the world—their compatriots the English, their allies the French—for to exalt themselves? Yet here they do it *continuellement, tous les jours*. They achieve even the impossible, they insult *les Bosches*. They deny to these our foes even the courage of *bons soldats*."

"Yes," observed Peter, "I have noticed that. They deny to the Bosches courage, the ability to shoot straight, the nerve to fight *a la baïonnette*. *C'est très bizarre*, since one would have thought that the more puissant their foes the greater honour would be gained by the Scots in overthrowing them. The Germans, swine as they are, are *très bons soldats*, of an ingenuity and resource

incomparable. Their formidable qualities are insisted upon in all the 'Notes from the Front,' which are sent to us by *L'Etat Major* for our instruction."

"Monsieur Peter, *votre accent est bon, mieux que celui de votre père.*"

"Don't I know it!" confessed Dad, smiling. "I know much more French than this long-legged lieutenant here, and get ten times as much practice, but I can't speak it as he does."

"Well, well, have courage, *mon ami*," said the Frenchman. "He is young, you are—not so young. *Mais, Monsieur, vous faites beaucoup de progrès.* Do you remember how three years ago you led me to the stairs because you did not know the French word '*l'escalier*'? But let us return to our *causerie des Ecossais*. I will recount to you a little story, *une petite histoire*, very illuminating. It was two days ago. I was at a meeting of the *bourgeoisie* in a cinema. A lecturer was describing, *mon Dieu!* the Battle of the Marne. Would you not say, Monsieur, that the French had some part in the victory of the Marne, some little part?"

"It was French absolutely!" cried Dad, with enthusiasm. "*Un coup de Joffre.* We helped at a critical moment with the torn rags of our poor little Army, but the strategy, the serene deliberation, the luring of the enemy up to the very walls of Paris, the *sang-froid* of the whole glorious plan, and the

magnificent forward dash at just the right time, were all yours, Monsieur. *Vive la belle France.*"

"You are too generous, Monsieur. We should not have gained so great a triumph had it not been for your heroic Army. But then you are English, of a race always noble and generous, of a chivalry equal to that of the French. We know. We fought you English for eight hundred years, and now we fight by your side. I embrace you, Monsieur. Now listen to the story of the Battle as told to the Scottish *bourgeoisie*, and to be cherished, no doubt, by them for ever. Listen. This is a true tale just as I tell you. The man in the cinema house said what is true, that the Bosches, in their millions, swept before them the French and the British up to the Marne. But then, said he, the invasion was stopped, shattered, and thrown back by *le mur d'acier*, the steel wall, of Scottish bayonets! The French generals, he said, were traitors, they had sold *La France* to the Kaiser, and but for *le mur d'acier*, the impregnable steel wall of the Scots, the French Army would have been swept into the sea! This is a true story, word for word as I heard it spoken. I understand English well, even the English which is spoken up here. And the cheers of the Scottish *bourgeoisie*, they were, of course, tremendous. Monsieur, I was calm, *très calme*, as you see me now. I rose in my place

and I asked of the lecturer, 'Were there then no English soldiers present?' See you, I spoke not then of the French. 'Yes,' he replied. 'There were some English regiments, but they would have been useless without the Scots to stiffen them.' *Ma foi!* the English of Crécy and Azincourt, of Trafalgar and Waterloo, the English whom we fought for eight hundred years. The English useless without the Scots to stiffen them! There was no power in England, doubtless, before what they call the Union; it had gone down, shattered, stamped in the mud of the field of Bannockburn! Monsieur, I still remained calm, *très calme*, as you see me now. 'And the French,' I shouted, so that all might hear me, 'those who were not traitors were, I suppose, cooks and scullions to the Scottish regiments?' How those *bourgeois écossais* laughed! They shouted and stamped upon the floor. They were inexpressibly diverted at the idea that half the French Army should be traitors and the other half cooks and scullions to the Scots! But what think you, Monsieur, of a people of whom nine-tenths—all save the remnant of the *monde*, *les instruits*, and *les chefs des grandes usines*—insult their kindred the English, insult most grossly their allies the French, in order, like childish braggarts, to exalt themselves? Is there in the wide world, even in Germany itself, such another race of egotists? I write for

the French newspapers, but I have not sent them this true story. For I love those *Ecossais* who are my friends, and I would not have them shamed by the gross foulness of the *barbares*, their countrymen. The French people love the Scottish soldiers, *les hommes aux jupons*, the men in petticoats, so silent and so brave; but did they know what these *bourgeoisie* say at home, *cette bourgeoisie très sale*, they would detest these *Ecossais* more even than they detest *les Allemands*. Monsieur, you see that I am calm, *très calme*, but reflect upon what a white flame of rage against this whole vile land must burn within my heart."

"I cannot wonder at it," said Dad, after a long pause. "And your story makes me rather sad. I have heard things like to it. But even the *bourgeoisie*, unbelievable as is their narrow self-sufficiency, are not all so utterly bad as your lecturer. When caught fairly young and trained, they make the most splendid soldiers. Peter, here, will tell you that the very narrowness of them, this super-patriotism, makes of them very staunch and terrible fighters. That is a great thing, a very great thing. They will die to a man for the honour of this Scotland of theirs. I can forgive them much. We English outnumber them by some eight to one, ours is most of the wealth, and most of the long history of the unending struggle for Britain's

freedom. These people are very jealous, very suspicious, and very self-conscious. They fear lest the glory of England may dim by its wider rays the no less merited glory of Scotland. So with them England is as nothing and Scotland everything. They have the defects of their barren land and their very restricted national history. Up to a little while ago, a mere hundred years, they were struggling for a hardly wrought existence against a cold climate, a poor, scanty soil, and were always looking jealously across the Border at the fertile fields, the rich towns and villages, the happy prosperity of the South. Then came the industrial revival, the few rich and the many poor. A large *bourgeoisie* sprang up, educated in the narrowest way, wholly ignorant of those graces of life which are born only after long generations of travail; then the Highlanders swept down into the cities, mingled with the Lowlanders of the agricultural shires, the Irish flocked in from over the sea, and there arose, after two or three generations, what you now see—a vast mass of *ouvriers*, workmen, mixed in blood though predominantly Scottish, rough, uncouth, almost wholly uncivilized. *Ces ouvriers*, Monsieur, are abominably housed, often ill-fed, for their wives are the worst cooks in the world, often drunken, for has not strong drink been sanctified by the national poet? They are not *barbares*, Monsieur,

though near to it, for from this depth they have been saved by the white, unquenchable light of Scottish patriotism. That is their one spiritual essence, it is their religion. Without it they would be indeed *barbares*, lost, groping blindly in the utter black industrial grime in which they live. Can you not sympathize, Monsieur, with *le peuple écossais*? You must not expect them, *la bourgeoisie* and *le gens du pays*, after two or three generations, to attain to that level of refined civilization upon which the French live, and with which they have delighted and instructed Europe for a thousand years."

It was a long speech, delivered slowly, haltingly, in a foreign tongue, but the Frenchman was moved, and Big Peter cried heartily: "Good old man, Dad!"

Then the Frenchman, in his graceful, impulsive way, cried: "Ah, *les ouvriers*, they know no better. I will forgive them willingly. For patriotism, even this insolent, ignorant pride of *les Ecossais*, is a great and glorious thing. The French themselves would all become bandits, *Apaches*, if they lived in these Northern cities of dreadful dirt. But *la bourgeoisie*, Monsieur, I do not forgive them. They have some education. *Les écoles publiques* here are good, so it is said; they can read, many have lived in England, they know what is just. Yet they seek deliberately to be unjust. They know in their hearts

that the Battle of the Marne was not won by *le mur d'acier*, the steel wall of the Scottish bayonets, yet they love to say it, and they will teach this lying legend to their children, and so the insult will be perpetuated through the ages. The unborn generations will be taught that the French were traitors or were cooks and scullions to the Scots, that the English were useless except when stiffened by the Scots. So it will be told in the long future. No, Monsieur, I cannot forgive *la bourgeoisie* this frightful crime. It is a sin against the light. It is unforgivable."

"Your story is almost as unjust to us English as to you Frenchmen, Monsieur, and yet I can forgive freely. So can my son Peter, is it not so, *mon brave fils*?"

"I laugh, Monsieur," cried Peter. "We are surely big and powerful enough not to worry about what the Scots say of us. Does a great slow mastiff move himself to resent the snappings of a jealous terrier? I love my men, and they are Scots, every one. They love me although I am English. So you see, an Englishman can live in amity with Scotsmen, can die with them, if need be, in love and fellowship. Look at my father, over there! He is quite popular here, I am told, and yet he is English of the English right through to the bone and marrow. For under their roughness, their uncouthness, their total ignorance of good manners, these

people have very warm hearts. It is not so much that they are ill-mannered, as that they have no idea of the meaning of manners. A man of *le peuple*, the lower classes, will shove a woman off a crowded tramcar to get in himself, simply because he wants to get in, and there is not enough room for two. He is incapable of understanding why he should give way. There is one place, and two people, and he is the stronger. The emblem of *le peuple* is the Thistle, a prickly plant, and their motto 'git oot of oor way.' But under all this horrible uncouthness these people have very warm hearts. They do not mean any harm. Be gentle with them, Monsieur, even flatter them a little. They are very children, and melt soft as butter under the warmth of kindly appreciation. Bear with their super-patriotism, for it makes of them the most terrible soldiers. My men are splendid. *Vivent les Soft Goods!* They would race me to Hell, and be furious if I got there first."

"Ah, Monsieur Lieutenant, it is easy for you. You are with the Army and these Scots are *très bons soldats*. It is easy to love *les soldats*, and they love you because you are *un très brave officier*. But *la bourgeoisie!* They are not trained, they have no discipline. For them nothing is of merit unless it be Scotch. And these *bourgeoisie* are about me all day long. I cannot forget them or forgive

them. And they are encouraged *tous les jours* in their vile self-satisfaction by *leurs sacrés journaux*. You read *les journaux écossais*, Monsieur?"

"Yes, every day. They are sound, solid papers. But I know what you mean. They are very, very Scotch; they get even on my calm nerves sometimes."

"Ah, is it so? Then realize, Monsieur, my French feelings. The foul German beast has his poison claws sunk deep into my beautiful France. He defiles our *châteaux*, he violates *au mot d'ordre*, our sweet women. Yet these *journaux écossais* pay so little heed to the sufferings of the French, that one would think they regard my devastated country as a God-given cockpit where *les Ecossais, tous seuls*, may win glorious triumphs over *les Allemands*. France is for them a theatre, an arena, for the display of Scottish heroism. 'A Scottish drummer-boy captures thirty Germans.' 'A Scottish regiment annihilates a German division.' These are *des titres véritables*. I have read them. The inference of these headlines is plain. If the Germans are such feeble folk that the few Scotsmen in France can chase them like hares, what then are the millions of Frenchmen doing? Cooking, I suppose, for the Scots, or guarding the battalions of prisoners which each Scottish soldier captures! This perpetual daily depreciation of the enemy is a

daily gross insult to us. Why is France still invaded? Because she is defended by the French! If *les Ecossais* took the job in hand, and were as numerous as us miserable Frenchies, pouf!—the Bosches would be over the Rhine and the siege of Berlin already begun! That is the plain inference. It sticks out every day from the broad columns of these *journaux écossais*. All the defeats are those of the French, all the victories are those of the Scots. It is nauseous, horrible, it makes me vomit. It is only in the evening when I am calm that my stomach can endure *les journaux écossais*. *Mais à déjeuner, jamais, jamais!*”

Dad smiled and Peter grinned. This acute imaginative view of the Scottish Press had not so vividly presented itself to their slow English minds. Neither English nor Scottish intelligences are conspicuous for imagination, or are quick at realizing, as by intuition, the ultra-sensitiveness of the Latin temperament. For them this speech was a searchlight stabbing the blackness of their mental night.

“I agree,” said Dad at last, “that the papers here are very Scotch. But how otherwise can they be conducted? They give to their readers that which they will buy to read. Our newspapers are not like yours, Monsieur, the organs of a group, a literary or political coterie. They are great com-

mercial properties. They are in scope national. They do not express the personality of a *rédacteur en chef*, or of *les directeurs*, but cater for the plain, simple appetites of a whole people. The Scots passionately love their own regiments; they do not care a row of pins for the other nine-tenths of the British Army, for the French or for the Russians. They want to read about the exploits of their own brothers and sons and fathers, and the newspapers give them what they want. The more highly coloured the Scottish exploits are the better they are liked. Even here, Monsieur, one discerns some merit in all this Scottish madness of super-patriotism. The fabled exploits arouse a desire for emulation in the dullest breasts, that desire impels new recruits to enlist, and so the ranks of the Scottish regiments are kept well filled. And so, after all, it appears to my easy English mind, that *les journaux écosais, qui vous font avoir envie de vomir*, do perform a useful public service. I confess, however, that I should not care for the job of running one of them. One's sense of perspective might in time become irretrievably dulled."

"You are too charitable, Monsieur. It is, no doubt, *une qualité anglaise*. But I have it not."

"It is not so much charity," remarked Dad, "as that Big Peter and I here have one vast consolation which more than atones for all

that we sometimes suffer in this Northern land. Have we not, old man?"

"We have," agreed Peter emphatically, "*La Flotte Anglaise.*"

"*Je ne vous comprends pas, messieurs.*"

"Do you not perceive the delicious, inexpressible humour of the position which we English enjoy here in Scotland during this War? Whatever may be the exploits of the illustrious Scottish regiments—and they are illustrious, *sans doute*, none better in our service or in yours—however much the Scots may, in super-patriotic pride, believe that they dominate the War on land, they are dependent for every man, for every gun, shell, or pound of meat, upon our English Navy. It is our Fleet which guards these iron Scottish shores, our Fleet which bears their regiments in safety to France, our Fleet which holds the ring for them and makes all their exploits possible. We do not forget this, Monsieur, those of us who live here in the North. For the Fleet is ours. It is 'British' only by courtesy. It is the old English Navy of the southern maritime counties and the Narrow Seas. In history, in tradition, in the skill won by a thousand years of service, even in hereditary personnel, it is the same English Navy which for centuries fought the French and the Spaniards and the Dutch, and then the French again, and now fights the Germans whenever they come out

of hiding. The Navy has never been more supremely English in material and spirit than it is to-day. The officers are bred up in the old English naval families and educated in the Devon naval schools. The trained sailors come from Devon and Cornwall, Dorset, Hampshire, Sussex, Kent, and Essex, where for generation after generation the flower of the youth has looked to service in the Fleet as its highest ambition. Here and there are others, a few from the midlands and north of England, a few from Scotland, but they are caught when very young boys and are moulded and absorbed into the vast, splendid English organism. The greatest Navy, Monsieur, is a small thing when one merely counts numbers. Our *Flotte Anglaise* is the greatest by far the world has ever seen, and yet of professional officers and sailors there are a bare 160 thousand—four army corps in number only—and these few, majestic in their power, rule the wide seas of the globe. The machines and the men, they are English. Many ships are built in the North here, but they are built to English designs and under the closest English supervision; the Scots make much money in their building, but the wonderful completed ships are English from truck to keelson, from the fire control tops to the double bottoms, for they are the product of English naval brains. They are not merely machines worked by men, but

the concrete material forms in which the Navy expresses its spiritual power. The men secrete the ships as the tortoise secretes its shell. So in our sure, incontestable knowledge, of which nothing can rob us, that upon our English Fleet depends the life and property of every man, the honour of every woman, in all broad Scotland, that not one single Scottish soldier could leave these Islands if our Fleet did not escort him, that he could not live or fight for a day if our Fleet did not provide him with the never-failing supplies, we bear with philosophic calm the exuberant self-sufficiency of this Northern people. For the laugh is ours, Monsieur, the laugh is ours."

As Dad spoke in slow, stumbling way, seeking for the correct French word, *le mot juste*, to express his thought, the Frenchman's eyes glittered, his face worked, his body shook with its struggles against an inward storm of laughter, and the tears rolled down his cheeks. At the end he sprang up, freed from polite restraint, fell upon Dad's neck, kissed him upon both cheeks and attempted a like assault upon Big Peter. But a great khaki-clad arm, stiff as a bar of iron, fended him off. The Frenchman, recoiling before the mighty thrust of Peter, shot into the middle of the room, where he danced, shrieking with joy, until exhausted, he fell once more into his chair. Dad wiped his face, wet with Gallic tears.

"You have made of me a happy man this day," gasped the exuberant Frenchman. "*Très heureux. C'est magnifique, splendide.* Ah, *La Flotte Anglaise*, that superb, unchallengeable, that invincible Fleet is yours. This little people shelter under your wide-spreading wings, and you, aloft, sublime, god-like, smile tenderly upon their jealous chatterings. Oh, *mes chers amis*, you come of a great people; if I were not French, I would say of the greatest people on earth. Our Fleet, *ce n'est rien, rien de tout, mais notre Armée, c'est grande, c'est terrible, c'est invincible.* And the spirit of our people, from Papa Joffre to the sucking child, it is without fear. *Toujours sans peur.* Are we not also a great people?" he inquired anxiously.

"Never in all your long history so great as to-day, Monsieur!" replied Dad soberly. "You have had *une renaissance extraordinaire.* A little while since and we feared for you, but now we have no fear at all. If I were not English of the English, I would wish to be French."

The Frenchman, ever sick to the soul at his enforced idleness, ever pleading with consuls and doctors for release, ever insisting that lameness is nothing: "One no more marches, what matters a twisted leg in these days of trenches. Permit me, I pray you, to shoot one Bosche and then die;" this poor crippled Frenchman burst into a storm

of tears. He was of the Midi, that land of sunshine, of tears and of laughter. He wept and thought it no shame.

Dad and Peter spoke softly together, trying in their awkward English way not to be conscious of their guest's emotion, and presently he dried his eyes and rose to say farewell. He shook hands with Dad and then gravely surveyed the towering form of Lieutenant Peter.

"You are English, Messieurs, and, moreover, you are from Devon, the land of the great Drake. The salt sea is in your blood. How comes it that this brave Monsieur Peter is a lieutenant of Highland Infantry? Should he not be an *officier* in your glorious *Flotte Anglaise*?"

"When he was young I did not design him for it. And now he is, perhaps, too old. But there are ways and means. Perhaps, Monsieur, you may yet see Big Peter put off that khaki for Navy blue, and from the towers of a battleship control the mighty guns which shall shatter the last remnants of the German Fleet."

"Loud cheers!" cried Peter. "But in the meantime I am quite happy to be with my platoon of gallant Soft Goods. *Vivent les Marchandises Douces!*"

CHAPTER X

RESTLESSNESS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

IF Mother and Dad had ever supposed that Big Peter would settle down satisfied with his new sphere of activity they were speedily to suffer disillusion. For three months he worked happily in his camp and billets by the sea, and then a spirit of divine discontent took possession of him. At first its outstanding symptoms were a passion for volunteering for every hazardous service which would remove him from a peaceful training-camp and precipitate him into the maelstrom of War at the front. Afterwards it took the form of a conviction that he had found his true *métier* in the Army, and that peace, with prompt relegation to a civilian career, would soon be upon him. He talked quite openly of the Horrors of Peace, implying that Peace would see the termination of his temporary commission.

We will pursue our study of these phases of temperament in their proper order. Big Peter started life in his battalion with the pathetic conviction that his military education for some five years in the Officers'

Training Corps left little for him to learn as a subaltern of foot. This childlike belief in his knowledge was shattered by two days of life as an officer, and for some weeks, as he avowed himself, he was hard put to it to conceal his abysmal ignorance from his men, who luckily, perhaps, knew far less than he did. He then set to work in earnest, and read and thought enormously. A handful of matches, which he could set out and manœuvre in platoons, companies, and battalions gave him endless diversion, and he would explain the mystic evolutions of his wooden forces to anyone who could be prevailed upon to listen. His bible became the "Infantry Red Book"—more closely studied than any Bible—and he analyzed until he knew them in the letter and spirit, both the "Field Service Pocket-book" and the confidential "Notes from the Front." He speedily discovered that the Notes of actual warfare, knocked the peace regulations endways, but this did not worry him. It provided a new and fascinating exercise in disentangling the grain from the chaff in official text-books. He was an excellent telegraphist, both by flag and key, and made himself a master of the complicated minutiae of signalling in all its branches. Then he read profound works on Strategy and Tactics, and discoursed upon them till exasperated fellow-subalterns, bored almost into physical violence, implored the

adjutant to have "The Brigadier" given a brigade, and be done with it—anything to remove him and his swollen learning from their presence! He was an Offence, a Reproach. What in God's name did a platoon leader want with Strategy and Tactics! The adjutant received these representations coldly, and made highly disagreeable comparisons between the keenness and devotion to duty of Big Peter and the incorrigible slackness of other youngsters whom he could name. He had his eye on these slackers, he declared, and by the God of War, they should be sent home to their office stools if improvement were not speedily made manifest. When the complainants—his good friends really, they were considering only the burden which relentless labour was imposing on his poor brain—implored him to relax his most unkindly efforts, he grinned and promised instant amendment. He would, he said, volunteer at once for the Motor Machine Gun Section, then forming, and known colloquially as the Suicide Corps. His brother officers, instantly softened by so urbane a reception, fell upon his neck, vowed that he was the best of good fellows, a fine soldier, and that his intimate knowledge of motors was the one thing needful to make the Suicide Corps receive him with shouts of joy. But among themselves they smiled darkly, and calculated with satisfaction the extreme brevity of the span

which yet remained to Big Peter of his intrusive life. "In about six weeks," they decided, "with decent luck, this Military Zealot will be no more."

But they suffered grievous disappointment, for the Suicide Corps had been so quickly filled up by gallant young officers that Peter's application was weeks too late. Big Peter, grinning more broadly than ever—he had the most capacious and alluring of grins—condoled with his dejected friends and essayed to cheer them by the news that he had already volunteered also for the Royal Flying Corps. Again they hoped against hope that Peter's proficiency as a motor-driver and mechanic would assure his instant acceptance for the Air Service, but again they suffered disappointment. Again the lists were full, before Peter's name, filtering down slowly through official channels, reached the far-distant and crowded South. And again Peter condoled with his friends—excellent fellows, but a thought too eager for his removal and speedy death—and assured them that he had other and wider plans which might yet before long rid them of his detested presence. At which assurance—having the fullest faith in Peter's energy and persistence—they cheered loudly and openly, drank his health at mess in flowing bumpers, and cried: "Join anything, the Staff at G.H.Q. if you like, the R.A.M.C., or the bally Horse Marines,

anything you like so long as your unapproachable example does not remain here to set the standard by which we are cursed. We are out to fight and then to go home, but you seem to enjoy the beastly war-job, and to make quite a Hobby of it. Go away, a very long way—here's good health to you, my son—the farther off the better. You won't be happy till you are dead." An unconsciously Greek sentiment which appealed to the classical mind of Peter, late Westminster K.S.

But though Big Peter's passion for plucking from his new profession all the intellectual fruits which it would yield, and his almost morbid yearning to offer himself for the most desperate of enterprises, were regarded with levity by his friends, they were to himself matters of portentous gravity. At this critical stage in his progress towards "finding himself" Peter was a most serious personage. His very keen sense of humour for a while failed him, and for a short time, measured happily only by weeks, his outlook upon life and death became almost that of a fanatic. He had made himself into an extremely competent infantry subaltern, and had an inborn faculty for inspiring his men with his own relentless energy and devotion. He was a glowing spiritual force which no platoon could resist, and "The Brigadier's" men, in their keenness and healthy hardihood, utterly belied their semi-official title of "Soft

Goods." They were fine Hard Stuff, and their leader was the hardest of them all. But this obviously round man in a round hole would persist in believing that he was not yet giving of his best, and hence he became obsessed by those uneasy stirrings of conscience which impelled him to long for other and more perilous fields of service. His seniors laughed over him almost as heartily as did his brother subalterns, but they, being more thoughtful, sometimes sighed, and the Colonel—a very Bayard—could have found it in his heart to weep. He loved the boy for his own and his father's sake, and longed to keep him safe under his own eye, yet he could not refuse permission when the eager youngster again and again pleaded for leave to volunteer for the many special corps which were then in course of formation. He realized that conscience, a good servant but a bad master, had for a while become Peter's remorseless tyrant.

Dad was profoundly worried, and he dates his rapidly whitening hair from these most trying weeks. He had been grey for many years, but one can endure greyness with philosophy and yet become appalled at the sight, in the mirror, of the hand of winter. And the splashes of snow were not to be wondered at. For every few days he would receive a new and alarming letter from Big Peter, and would discuss it interminably

with his unhappy wife. Each letter was to them a fresh agony, as if a knife were twisted round in their bleeding hearts. They came to dread the postman almost as much as do those parents with sons in the fighting-lines dread the cheery whistle of a telegraph-boy and the sight of the horrible buff envelopes he carries.

“Dear Dad,” Peter would write, “I am not doing myself justice. There are so many things which I could do but for which I have no present opportunity. I have sent in my name for the Motor Machine Gun Section. This is just the thing for me. The machine-guns are mounted as side-cars to S—— motor cycles, and I know them as well as I do Jitny. No one could be more fit for this special service than I. I was sure you would approve.”

“Is it so very dangerous, do you suppose?” Mother would ask distressfully, and Dad, perjuring himself gallantly in the best of causes, would swear that if Peter had consciously sought for ease and security he could not possibly have found a better refuge. “He will be careering about all the time,” declared he, “and not be squatting helpless in trenches to be shot at like a sitting pheasant. When a man is moving it takes 40,000 rifle bullets and 800 shrapnel shells to bring off

a hit upon him." So spake the statistician, but in secret he was bitterly convinced that the Suicide Corps had found its fitting name.

But Mother was not so easily satisfied that the pilotage of scouting aeroplanes—shot at indiscriminately by foes and inexperienced friends—was almost dull as a sport and of a safety comparable with a feather-bed. But Dad made the effort to convince her.

"Before the War," declared this untruthful hero, "the Flying Service was regarded by all the experts as superlatively dangerous. Admiral Bacon, I believe, stated that not an aeroplane would exist, nor a pilot be alive, on either side after three months of hostilities. But practice has, as usual, made nonsense of the theories. The casualties among our flying pilots and observers have been astonishingly few, much smaller in proportion than among the infantry. Big Peter, without in the least realizing the fact, is actually seeking to fly from the dirt and danger of the trenches into the serene and secure heights of the sky. Have no fears for him, my dear. He will steer a fighting aeroplane as safely and as deftly as he handles a car. And he won't get his feet wet, and will always be warmly clad with lots of flannel next the skin."

"I am not quite a fool!" observed Mother crossly.

"I ask your pardon, Madam," retorted

Dad, "but if you will talk with returned soldiers they will tell you that they dread the perpetual wet and rheumatism of the trenches much more than they do the Bosche bullets."

"I suppose that he must have his way?" said Mother unhappily.

"He must," cried Dad, most emphatically and seriously. "At any cost to our own feelings we must not seek to check him. He would never forgive us. War is a bit sore on fathers and mothers, sweetheart. It takes no account of them at all."

But even Dad, fearful though he was of interfering with the plans of his big and restless son, felt compelled to put his foot down when Peter, rather diffidently, sought permission to offer for the Secret Service. "I am pretty good at French and German," wrote that hardy creature, "and at German, with a little practice, could pass for a native, especially in the dark. Thank Heaven, I don't look like a Bosche. Spying does not sound a pretty trade, but nothing is more vital to our success than accurate news of the enemy. No one is ordered to go on Secret Service, but, if you don't mind, I will offer to take it up and train for it."

"No," replied Dad, "not if I have the last word, my son. I won't oppose you as regards any fighting service, however desperate

and forlorn, but I draw the line firmly at a trade which means almost inevitably a white bandage and a firing party. Spying, even in war, is a dirty business. Come up here at Christmas, if you possibly can, and talk things over with us. I have views for you which may be of interest."

It was fortunate for the peace of mind of the whole family, now groping blindly in the fog of war, that Big Peter's mental processes took another sharp turn, and one which happily proved to be permanent. His attempts at volunteering having been foiled or rejected, he thought hard upon the problem of his Career—in very large capitals—and became convinced that in the fighting services of the Crown he had found his true vocation. He hated war as much as ever, but he loved the science and machinery of it, the organization and splendid discipline which drew out from men the best that was in them. To his mind, now passing through travail toward its old sober balance, the Navy and Army seemed to be spiritual rather than crude material forces; and having entered into this conception of their true significance in the Order of Things, he was terrified at the prospect of being rudely cut off from them. He held a temporary commission "for the duration of the War," and wars, even the longest and worst of them, endure for only a short span in the life of a man. He already

began to dread the termination of the War and the end of himself as Lieutenant. He saw clearly now, after four weeks of mental vicissitudes—during which the dear lad passed from youth to maturity—that his energies could most profitably be devoted to the supreme task of changing his temporary commission into one which would be pukka, which would continue unbroken in peace as well as in war, and would at a stroke, raise his status from that of amateur to professional. He now, under the influence of this quite rational conviction, rejoiced that his offers of service in various and perilous corps had been rejected. For had he prematurely departed from his billet by the sea he would have had no opportunity of bringing to fruition his ultimate ambitions. Had he not fallen in the War, he would have been cast forth at its close from the Army and plunged, as a civilian, into the Horrors of Peace. Filled with this new idea, which had Dad's fullest sympathy and support, he secured leave and joined the family circle at Christmas.

Few of us will forget that first Christmas in the midst of a world's war. Only a few months earlier we had fondly hoped, indeed, confidently declared, that Christmas would see the back of the Germans broken. But all such illusions had been shattered. We now all realized that the War was to be about us for years to come and that Peace and

Goodwill had fled from Europe in affrighted horror.

Tony had come home, and deterred neither by rain, nor frost, nor snow, nor fog, daily conducted his beloved pukka Colonel in the faithful Jitny to the barracks, where lay his work. Tony's uniform had become his only wear, and he was deeply gratified when feminine friends of his parents cried out against the supposed wickedness of Kitchener, at seizing such children for the Army. He could forgive them for calling him a child if they would only believe that he was a member of the fighting forces. On his sleeves Tony now wore, with infinite pride, the chevrons of a corporal, for he had received high promotion, and no longer ranked as a mere private. In his eyes his two worsted stripes shone far more brightly than did Big Peter's twin stars. Anybody, for the asking, could become a temporary lieutenant, but only the most conspicuous merit could achieve the chevrons of a corporal of O.T.C.! When reminded that Peter, in his day, had been a sergeant of the same great Corps, he smiled darkly and hinted that base favouritism, induced by the "sucking-up" of Peter to the captain, was alone responsible for his brother's promotion. His own stripes, it was superfluous to state, were gained by supreme efficiency.

By this time Tony had begun his great work

on the Training of Officers, but for the present he kept that secret inviolate except in a weak moment from Roddy. He aspired to spring the work upon his awe-stricken relatives, not as a forlorn MS. seeking a home, but as a published book, blazing on the bookstalls in the glory of real print. In Tony's view — not wholly erroneous — an author has no honour among those of his own household until the great world without has put the seal of print upon him. Even the pukka Colonel, Tony's confidant in most things, was not made free of the fascinating secret.

Wee Roddy had also come home and cavorted joyously, being totally free from apprehensions of a return to school—he had before him four endless weeks of holidays. He was slightly annoyed at not finding the hen installed in the back garden—pursuant to his orders—but reflected that as the matron's solitary sheep at school had failed miserably in the yield of daily kidneys, the productive energies of a hen, measured in boiled eggs, might have proved equally disappointing.

Among his Christmas presents was a box of water-colours and a broad sketching-pad, at the sight of which the artist within him awoke—he had a queer passion for music and colour, which flashed forth at most unexpected and even embarrassing moments—

and he resolved to devote all his energies to Art. So he bent to the composition of "masterpieces," as he called them himself—weird impressions of light and shade, form and colour, which, though inevitably crude and unfinished, yet were alive with most unchildlike purpose. His splashes and blobs of colour were vital in essence. In Roddy's "masterpieces," executed with flying brushes in about fifteen minutes apiece, snow was real and cold, rain was dismal and desperately wetting, mountains loomed mistily through water-laden air, and the sun set sombrely over the smoky city. Dad laughed over the boy's strange, vivid sketches, and then sighed.

"The others are by comparison simple creatures," said he; "one can predict their performances with some confidence. But this Duckling of ours, Wee Roddy, has, I much fear, some grains of that baffling quality which men call genius. We must be very strict with him and make of him a Millionaire. Then he can paint as much as he pleases without hurt. But if first he takes to Art, with that serious, devoted mind of his, then good-bye for ever to the Hampshire cottage. One may combine Wealth with Art but never Art with the pursuit of Wealth. But I don't expect that the choice will rest with us. He will go his own way."

Mother, to whom this speech was made,

took up the "masterpieces" and hid them in some deep, secret spot, until that day should arrive when Roddy shone forth as the Great Man acclaimed and unchallengeable. For there was no doubt, either in her mind or in Dad's, as to their small son's ultimate greatness, though much uncertainty as to the precise form of its development. In the meantime Roddy kept Mother busy, for he threw off his "masterpieces" almost more rapidly than she could put them into a place of safety. It was like trying to catch the flakes of a snowstorm.

Big Peter, in splendid health and appetite, but rather depressed in spirits, strolled in on Christmas Eve and fell at once into the subject which occupied his active mind.

"Dad, old man," cried he, "you played up strongly over my present commission, and I look to you to work another miracle. I have given up volunteering for wild sporting corps, but want to get a real permanent job in the Army. How does one set about it?"

Mother joined the pair, and the three heads drew together while Dad discoursed.

"The Regular Service is the last thing which we designed for you, but the War has scattered all our peace ideas as with a high-explosive bomb, and you shall have what you want—that is if you have the grit to earn it for yourself."

"Show me the way," replied Peter, with calm confidence, "and I will do the rest."

"That speech," cried Dad, laughing, "reminds me of the advertisement of a firm of hire-purchase furnishers: 'You get Married; We do the Rest!'"

"Frivolous old man," observed Peter, his spirits rising, for he knew that Dad would not jest unless his mind were clear of trouble.

"Now, Peter, attend very carefully to every word that I say. I have gone very closely into your affairs and am primed to the teeth. It happens that I have many friends at the War Office and the Admiralty, and they have favoured me with their opinion and advice. One thing is quite clear. Put it in your pipe and smoke it. You are a temporary officer in a Service battalion, recruited solely for the War, and you have no chance at present of a transfer to a permanent commission in the Regular first line Army, either during or after the War. A transfer might be managed later on; it is not impossible, but the chances are all against you, since the many vacancies are being filled up from Sandhurst, Woolwich, and the Special Reserve—the old Militia. My friends say that the officially appointed broad path is the only one certainly open for traffic, and it leads through the doors of Woolwich and Sandhurst. Entrance to these training schools is by examination, no difficult matter nowadays,

and the period of training there has been shortened to about three months."

"No, thanks," grunted Peter. "I am not going to be a measly Cadet after serving as a Lieutenant."

"I was sure that you would say that. So Woolwich and Sandhurst are definitely off. There remains, however, Quetta, the Indian Staff College, where British officers are trained for the native Army."

"Again, no thanks, old man. I will not go to India and lose this War. It is not good enough."

"Just what I expected. So far I have accurately forecasted your views. Now we get down to real business. There is yet another Service. I come to a famous scientific Corps, with the most illustrious of records, a Corps which stands between the Navy and Army and knows all the secrets of both; which serves with either, and which trains its own officers at its own headquarters. It is a haughty, self-contained Corps, which sets a standard of all-round efficiency high enough even for your overmastering ambitions. It is called the Royal Marine Artillery."

"The Blue Marines!" exclaimed Peter. "I know them by reputation. They are incontestably IT. The Red Marines, Light Infantry, are a splendid lot, big, long-service men, but for science and ever-ready efficiency

ashore or afloat give me the Blue Corps. They run armoured cars and heavy howitzers in France, and have lately been pounding Zeebrugge from naval monitors."

"They hang, as it were, between land and sea," chanted Dad, "and are at the disposal of either in case of need, though officially they are under the Admiralty. They have to know everything about guns, from maxims to 15-inch monsters in naval turrets, all about torpedoes, electricity and wireless. They are Heavy Gunners ashore and Naval officers afloat. Everything that is deadly and scientific and man-killing comes within their lurid province."

"How does one get in?" cried Peter with enthusiasm.

"Wait a bit. I am coming to that. Just at present the Blue Marines want good permanent officers for sea-service to help man the turrets of the new super-Dreadnoughts. Sea service, my son, with the newest guns in the newest Dreadnoughts of *La Flotte Anglaise*; just think of that and roll your tongue round it."

"Peter was very sick indeed, crossing from Antwerp," put in Mother, smiling.

"Naval officers always begin by being violently sick," declared Dad with assurance, "and some of them never leave off. Nelson was sick during one blockade, for twenty-two months. Peter must wallow with the

rest. He will get over it, and while it lasts it will do him good. I confess that in making plans for you I have been largely guided by my own hereditary instincts. The Navy is in my Devon blood and in yours. It is all in all to me. And there is another point which will appeal specially to Mother here. At sea, in a big battleship, a man may be killed or drowned—the risk is essential to the game—but at least he lives like a gentleman until he is dead. On land service, being killed must often come as a blessed relief from months of reeking in filth. I would far sooner be killed and have done with it than spend weeks without taking off my clothes, and then to have the vermin burnt off my foul skin with a blow-lamp.”

“Ugh, you horrid creature!” cried Mother. “Shut up, can’t you!”

“It is little more than the truth about some of our poor fellows. The arrangements are better now than they were at first.”

“How does one get into the Royal Marine Artillery?” again asked Peter.

“By examination. You can’t get out of that. I have tried to wriggle you through a back door, but have failed. The standard is higher than for Woolwich or Sandhurst, and one must be near the top to be sure of selection for the Blue Corps. You might get fobbed off with the R.M.L.I., if not high enough.”

“When is the examination?”

“In a little more than three weeks—in twenty-four days, to be exact.”

“That makes my chances hopeless,” wailed poor Peter. “Your Blue Marine Corps might have been organized for me, so closely does it fit into my ideas of service. There is indefinite room in it for professional growth. But three weeks! And me occupied all day with my military duties! It is just impossible, Dad.”

“Wait a bit,” calmly spoke Dad, opening a drawer and producing many papers. “Meanwhile, as the story goes, I have not been idle. Here are the application forms for admission to the exam., all ready except for your signature. We are a day or two late, but I am assured that red tape is off. Here is a formal permission from your Colonel—a very white man and your good friend and mine, never forget him, Peter—not only to enter for the exam., but to be free of parades and other duties, except in the morning, from now onwards. Here is an acceptance of your candidature from the Admiralty and a promise that you shall have the Blue Corps if it can decently be contrived. All really depends upon your place in the final results. So everything being settled, it is up to you to go in and win. That is quite simple. I have said it. Bless you, my child.” Dad laughed like a lighthearted schoolboy and threw the papers on the table. “Kiss me, Mother;

I have earned that chaste reward, for I am going to make of your son a Blue Marine."

"I am overwhelmed," gasped Peter. "You seem to have thought of everything and prepared for everything. You must have put in a lot of work, old man, these last few days. But the exam. remains, and that is up to me. Three weeks! Just pass over the schedule of subjects, please."

Peter studied the schedule for a long time and then slowly delivered judgment. "It looks like a mighty close thing, yet you say that I must be high up to win! My hat! If I scrape in at the bottom it will be a miracle! The language part will be easy. My Latin, Greek, French, and German are all right, though I have not touched them since July. My elementary mathematics are all right, too. But I see that I have to reach the Woolwich standard in Intermediate Mathematics, and here I sit, wholly ignorant of Trigonometry or Mechanics, except of the practical kind. And as for English History and Geography—well, you know what a severely classical education is like. Dad, old man, it is no go, *no bally go*."

"Excuse me, Big Peter, but you are little better than an ass. I admit that one cannot cram languages in a few days, but luckily you will not have to try. At them you are a scholar far in advance of the Army standards. But, as regards the rest of this schedule here,

there is not a subject which cannot be copiously crammed in three weeks even if one forgets all the stuff three weeks afterwards. Why, I believe that I could do the trick myself, and I have not been to school for thirty years. You are just the man for this desperate job. You have the jewel of a memory and a head as sound as seasoned oak."

Peter thought seriously for some minutes, and then suddenly burst into a roar of laughter. "I can do it, good people. Don't you worry. I have just remembered *Othello* and *King John*. I am not mad," he went on, seeing an alarmed look upon Dad's face, "but very, very sane. Listen. One day, a year or so ago, in a spasm of remorse at their neglect of English Literature, the authorities at Westminster ordered the Sixth to study *Othello* and *King John*, and offered some small prize for the best papers. I read *Othello* because it interested me; it was hot stuff and worth studying for its own sake, but *King John* struck me as rather dull. I worked pretty hard at *Othello*, and in the first paper on that play did jolly well. So well, indeed, that when coming out I said to another fellow—a town kid at Ashburnham who rather fancied himself at Shakespeare—that if I had read *King John* I would have made a shot for the prize. He gave a nasty grin and offered to bet a bob that I couldn't

get within ten places of the prize even if I read *King John* till I burst. 'Done,' I said. 'I will read *King John* for the rest of the day, and half the night if need be, and I will bet another bob that I do better at it than you.' 'Done,' said he. So I went straight back to College, cut cricket—it was luckily a half-holiday—and just soaked up *King John* till I knew it as well as all the commentators. Next day I got ninety-five per cent. of the marks—better than *Othello*, for which I got only eighty per cent.—and came out first by quite a lot. So, you see, I won both bets. *King John* for ever! I will raise a coach somehow and cram Trigonometry, Mechanics"—he consulted the schedule—"Physics and Chemistry. I will cram the whole lot just as I did old *King John*."

"Saved!" shouted Dad. "I will help all I can. I was a Wrangler once, and the desperate effort did not drive all my mathematics out of my poor head. It does with most people. But what about English History and Geography?"

"You may well ask. I don't know the first thing about either."

"You shall be soaked in them by me. Accurately and scientifically soaked. It will be easy, for success in examinations is a mere matter of psychology—the accurate study of the examiners' minds. Just now every examiner will be thinking of the war, the whole

war, and nothing but the war. The History questions will be all about subjects bearing on the war, and so will those in Geography. I will think the whole programme out, send you down books suitable for your strictly limited studies, and lecture to you during each week-end, which you must spend here. The Colonel will give you leave."

"Every one?" cried Mother. "How delightful!"

"Every one," firmly repeated Dad. "I will lecture Peter upon the Moscow Disaster, Napoleon's Campaign in the Marne district during 1814, the rise of the English Navy, the growth of the German Empire, the German Colonies, and heaps of other things. During brief intervals for rest and refreshment, we will attack problems in Statics and Dynamics. Peter, old man, I already see that we shall mightily enjoy these next three weeks."

"It is going to be the very Devil of a cram," murmured the aspiring Blue Marine.

"Clear the decks," cried Dad. "We will begin at once." And that volatile, though elderly, gentleman, drove Mother from the room and discoursed to Peter—who industriously took notes—upon the strategy and tactics of Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812. It was, as he said, the most obvious of the subjects which would haunt the examiners' minds. Dad cross-examined his pupil, drew maps and diagrams on scraps of

paper—had he possessed at the moment some black chalk he would, we are convinced, have sacrificed his study walls—and by repetition and repeated questioning, filled up Peter to the back teeth. “That is done!” he cried. “Now I will dress for dinner, and we will have another lecture afterwards. To-morrow—it is fortunate that the shops are open on Christmas Day in this godless country—I will get you a choice selection of books. Peter, my gallant pupil, we are going to win, hands down.”

“I may as well sign those papers at once,” cried Peter; “and you can post them to-night.”

At dinner the other boys were informed of the new sphere of operations in which Peter had already opened his campaign. Tony sniffed contemptuously, but Wee Roddy—who attended the board “by special request,” as the concert people say—applied at once for any volume which would acquaint him with the Whole Duty of a Blue Marine. “I shall then,” he observed thoughtfully, “be able to explain all about them to Peter.” Dad, for once at a loss—he could not recall any work entitled “Blue Marines for Beginners,” or “Marines, and How to Make Them”—promised to dig up somewhere a Navy List, and politely expressed the hope that Roddy would extract from it something of value and interest. Wee Roddy did.

Tony, who had continued to sniff, remarked that, "We Navy men do not think much of the Marines. They're a rotten lot."

"We Navy men!" roared Peter, to whom the honour of the Blue Corps was already his own. "You will never pass even the potty exam. for Navy Clerks, not in a hundred years."

"And you won't pass in to the Marines, not in three hundred," hotly retorted Tony. "Three weeks! My aunt, what cheek!"

"Here, stop all that nonsense," cried Dad. "Don't you make any mistake, Tony, my friend. Peter is going to pass his exam., and you, I hope, will in due course pass yours also. Peter, your limitless capacity for absorbing information fills me with the deepest respect. Quick, tell me. Why did Napoleon retreat from Moscow?"

"The Russians burnt it," snapped Tony, eager to be first.

"Yes," drawled Wee Roddy. "They gave the sacred capital of Holy Russia to the flames to repel the presumptuous invader. What does 'presumptuous' mean?"

Peter smiled in a lofty way. His information, embodying the results of the latest research, was scarcely an hour old, yet he delivered it as if it were the profound fruit of years of study: "Napoleon was forced to retreat from Moscow because he had with him

less than 90,000 men out of nearly half a million, and was desperately short of supplies of food and ammunition. The Russians were in stronger force hard by, yet he held on in Moscow for a month, till well into October, in the expectation that the enemy would seek terms of peace. But they didn't. It is doubtful whether the Russians had anything to do with the burning of Moscow—they claimed credit for the feat, afterwards, but not at the time—and in any case, the fires were not the proximate cause of the Emperor's retreat. He would have equally been obliged to retire had the city never been burnt. Your history, Tony, is twaddle."

"Excellent!" cried Professor Dad. "I will go on filling you up to-morrow. You are like one big beautiful dry sponge. You can suck up any amount of stuff and then give it forth to the slightest squeeze."

"Not to-morrow!" cried Mother aghast. "Let the poor boy have a holiday on Christmas Day."

"Certainly not," returned Dad. "This is no time, woman, to talk of holidays. When the exam. is over, Peter can stand on his head and let his rapidly accumulated knowledge run out at his ears. But till then he is my captive, my victim. We will take political Geography to-morrow, Peter, with a dash of Dynamics as a rest."

"Is this sort of thing to go on every week-

end for the next three weeks?" inquired Mother patiently.

"At every one," returned her husband, granitic in firmness.

"Then I think, Peter, if you will excuse me, I will pay a round of visits to the stately homes of the local aristocracy, my friends. This house will be no place for me."

Dad strode forth early the next day, and after an exhaustive exploration of a book-seller's shop, returned with a carefully selected bundle of books, including an aged, torn copy of the "Navy List." "The best I could get, Roddy," said he. "The 'Navy List' is under censorship just now."

Dad then lectured at Peter till lunch, took him for a walk in the afternoon and talked without ceasing, returned to tea, and afterwards went on with his discourse until it was time to dress for dinner. "We have had a great day," he cried, unwearied as when he and Jitny devoured broad counties. This coming examination of Peter's was for him a new and wholly delightful toy. Peter pressed both hands upon his closely cropped skull—to keep it from bursting, he explained.

At the Christmas dinner the conversation became general "by special request"—Mother's, this time; she explained that Little Jane's mind, already excited by sitting up to dinner, was too tender to withstand the violent exercises of the previous day—and no word

was spoken of the Marines until afterwards in the drawing-room. It was then that Wee Roddy suddenly produced the shining jewel which he had extracted from the rather heavy soil of the "Navy List." "There is not much in this book about the Royal Marines," he observed, "and what there is I find rather difficult to understand. But it is interesting to learn that Peter is to be a Horse Marine."

"What!" cried Mother, Dad, and Peter together.

"A Horse Marine," repeated Roddy gravely. "It is here in this fat blue book." And waving the "Navy List" above his head he danced about the room upon his toes—an infallible sign of bubbling joy within his whimsical soul.

Tony grabbed at the book. "Leave go, Tony, you little stinker!" screamed Roddy. "I found it, it's mine." Then, opening the "Navy List" at a place marked by a long lean finger, he slowly read:

DRESS REGULATIONS, OFFICERS, ROYAL MARINES.

II. Horse Furniture.

17. Mounted officers of the Royal Marines are to use the same pattern saddlery as described in the Dress Regulations of the Army, 1911, with the following exceptions: . . .

There was an awful silence, broken at last by the hysterical shrieks of Tony, and the shrill cackles of the small explorer. Peter seized the "Navy List" and examined the whole passage which Roddy had begun to read.

"It is all right," said he. "There is nothing to laugh at. When Marines serve on land they are, of course, equipped like the Army, and the field officers are mounted. Hence these regulations as to Horse Furniture."

But this dull explanation, correct though it was, was thrown away upon Tony, Roddy, and Little Jane. They refused to be robbed at any price of the joyous picture, which presented itself to their ribald minds, of their powerful, big brother, bestriding a tall charger, and curvetting upon the steel decks of a battleship.

"Roddy, I thank thee," gasped Tony, wiping his eyes. "Ask of me any guerdon and I will give it thee, even unto half of my kingdom. My elderly, unmarried daughter is yours."

"Peter," cried Roddy. "Let me help you buy your Horse Furniture. I love nice smelly leather things."

"Peter, Peter," screamed Little Jane, "give me a ride on your horse!"

"I expect," commented Roddy, while Peter smiled kindly at the children, "that

Peter will keep the horse in his cabin and hang up the Furniture on his hat-rack. He can put the hay and oats under his bed. As there won't be much room, he must teach the horse to eat out of his hand. When the weather is cold he can cuddle up to it for warmth as they do on battlefields, and when the food turns bad, as often happens in ships, he can cut off bits of it to eat. If he is careful they won't be missed. Oh, I can see that horses are jolly useful things to keep on board ships."

* * * * *

Again the wonderful thing was done, and in the doing did not prove to be so very difficult. But Peter will always have a rather hazy recollection of that delirium of perpetual cram in which he lived during those fateful three weeks. In the mornings there were the usual parades and exercises—most valuable now as a physical relief from unstinted mental toil. In the afternoons came mathematics with a tutor whom he had discovered—a pearl of a tutor, who, grasping the urgencies of the case, threw off all his educational trappings and came forth as an unscrupulous stuffer of Big Peter, just as if he had been bidden to fatten up a turkey for market. He shed all theories of education, did this treasure of a tutor, all the trade union rules of his profession, and filled up Peter in a few days with the concentrated essence of more

mathematics than he could have acquired in half a dozen leisurely terms at school. And so deftly did the artist wield his stuffing apparatus that the turkey suffered surprisingly little from indigestion. But then Big Peter always had an iron stomach.

The week-ends spent in the overpowering society of Dad were perhaps the worst of Peter's sufferings. The tutor might occasionally flag, but Dad was as untiring as Jitny's engine. His recollection of mathematical principles was close and accurate, even after so many years of removal from their study, and his skill in resolving difficulties—he had been a schoolmaster himself for a year or two—won Peter's ungrudging admiration. His lectures upon History and Geography, dealt with as parts of one subject—for, as Dad maintained, History is the story of the human race in its struggles with Geography—were very carefully prepared and were perfect of their kind. They gave Peter just that grasp of fact and inference which he needed in order that he might comprehend the spirit of the various historical periods, and the inter-relation of Geography and History. More could not be done in the time, but as Peter was a rapid and graceful writer of English, he could be depended upon to display his scanty knowledge to the best advantage on the examination counter.

But though Peter was fully conscious of

the vast quantities of material which every day were dumped into his mind, his gallant spirit sometimes almost failed him. "I'm afraid it's no use, Dad," he groaned. "We are putting up a noble fight, but the enemy is too strong for us. There is only a week left."

"Peter!" cried Dad crossly, for he too felt the strain. "Be so good as to stick to *Othello* and leave King John to me. Stick to the language business, which you know and I don't, and leave the rest—History, Geography, Trigonometry, Statics, Dynamics, and Higher Algebra—to your tutor and to me. We understand exactly what we are about, you don't. By the way, just employ your spare time in mugging up the elements of Light, Heat, Electricity, and Magnetism. These things all mean marks, and will be child's play to an engineer like you."

Peter almost wept. Spare time! Did it look as if he were short of occupation to fill up the flying hours! "I will try," said he, forcing a smile—Dad really was the limit! "All these subjects are quite easy, and I know something of them already."

"Good," cried Dad, heartily. "That will be a great help. Don't forget, too, to practise a bit at Freehand Drawing, and put in a few hours with compasses and scales."

"Is that all?" humbly asked Peter.

"All that I can think of at present."

Everything comes to an end, even a three

weeks' debauch of unremitting cram, and the day at last dawned on which Peter was due to leave his camp for London and the examination room.

"Take a day or two off," said Dad. "The Colonel will give leave. We have done all that is possible, and you will be the better for a day or two of rest. Don't worry about the exam. You have only to remember our stuffings for a week; after that they will fade away like a bad dream. I have been through the same sort of cram scores of times and never suffered any ill-effects."

So Peter departed, passed his medical tests with supreme ease—his figure stripped to the buff was a joy to look upon—and then slogged at the paper work day after day for a week. At the end of it all, he despatched a wire to Dad, and took a nice girl out to the theatre. He had earned this little relaxation. When Dad read the message he chuckled gaily, and passed it over to Mother. The wire ran:

"Be of good cheer. It is *Othello* and *King John* over again."

"Has he passed, do you think?" cried Mother anxiously.

"Passed!" roared Dad. "Our Peter only passed! I will eat my boots if the young scorcher doesn't come out near the top."

And he did. We will spare the feelings of the examiners, by not revealing the

completeness of Big Peter's triumph over them. But he was so high up in the lists that the permanent commission in the Blue Marine Corps was, so to speak, his for the taking. Big Peter had won through.

"He has done us proud, has little Peter," muttered Dad, when some weeks later the lists were published. The gay creature choked for a moment as he felt Mother's faithful arm laid tenderly about his neck. "Our little curly-haired Peter. Oh, my dear, my dear, if he had failed——"

And for almost the first time in her life, Mother saw the tears rolling down her husband's cheeks.

CHAPTER XI

THE ROAD ONCE MORE

SUMMER had come round once more, and for the third time in this simple history Dad was about to leave for the South and the holiday of his dreams. The War, a year before, had allowed him less than a week of the playtime which he loved, but the prospect before him was now bright, though Europe was still overwhelmed by a horror which seemed to be without end. We had by this time come to regard War and Death as a normal condition of Life, and drank our daily draught of blood without that revulsion which months before had sickened us to the very soul. So many disappointments had been suffered and endured that Fate seemed almost to have exhausted the possibilities of further malice. The clouds were of a deadly black, but there was always present to our minds the bright silver lining—our incomparable and unconquerable Fleet. All wars are ultimately decided at sea, and upon the sea. England was, as ever, supreme. “Nothing can now happen which is unexpected,” observed Dad, as his holiday drew nigh, “except

the Day of Judgment. And I shan't need to come back for that."

Big Peter was at Portsmouth, assiduously slaving at the long course of technical training which the Sea Service exacts in war-time as in peace. When first he joined the Blue Corps as a professional officer, he had visions of service with the heavy guns in Gallipoli or of bearing his part in digging the German Navy out of its refuge behind the defences of Heligoland. But the Admiralty had other views. His work was to lie in the future rather than in the immediate present, and it fell to his lot, as to so many other young, ardent spirits, to be held to the learning of his job instead of being thrown half-trained into the pit of war. "We regular officers," he wrote—and exasperation plainly obtruded between the lines—"are treated as if we were made of eggshell china. All the dangerous jobs are given to the temporaries—no one seems in the least to mind losing them—but we are so precious that we musn't be risked. Isn't it awful rot?"

"I am delighted to learn," replied Dad, "that someone in authority has a glimmer of sense. Of what use is it to spend all our treasures of young men? England has a future to look to as well as a present and a past. Your turn will come soon enough, old man. When the gunnery and other courses are completed you will be sent to

sea, there to await the dawning of that Day of final reckoning with the Bosche Fleet. None of you can be trained too long or too thoroughly for that last Battle of the Giants."

"They won't come out," groaned Peter.

But Peter, whatever may have been his private feelings, stuck firmly to the work before him, not cramming now but learning slowly, gravely, thoroughly, and testing in practical fashion all that he learned. Dad, in his northern recesses, still heard now and then rumbles of discontent roll up from the South, but they caused him only to smile and to feel pride in his big son's ardour for service. He knew that Peter had found his Career, and that it would be very good. He rejoiced to see returning that gay spirit of humour, which in himself had made smooth the path of life, and which would, in Peter, prove a very present help in time of trouble. "I am thinking," wrote Peter, one day, "of insuring my life so as to repay all that you have spent upon me. But don't order a new car on the strength of it, as nobody in the regular Blue Corps ever gets killed. We lost a man in the Flying Corps once, and are so proud of him that we have put up a Roll of Honour in the barracks, upon which his name stands alone in letters of gold. Of course the temporaries have died like flies, but they have no status, and don't appear in the Roll. This is a most splendid Corps,

and I am immensely proud to be in it, but I wish that they wouldn't take quite so much care of us."

"The old Peter is coming back," commented Dad, as he read this most characteristic letter. "I began to fear lest he were becoming too serious."

Upon the day appointed for his departure, Dad issued forth in command of the ever-dependable Jitny. Even she had changed with the passage of time. A new coat of paint had brought a flush as of youth to her grey skin, and a complete internal overhaul—during which every worn part had been tenderly repaired or renewed—had fired her with unsurpassable energy. Never before, even in her vigorous youth, had the faithful creature seemed so high in spirit or so instantly and submissively responsive to the hand of her master. She had outgrown, perhaps, some of the reckless exuberance of extreme youth, but in its place had come calm wisdom and unshakable steadiness, which made her now, in ripe middle-age, the most sympathetic of travelling companions. Dad loved his faithful grey beast more than ever, and firmly believed that in her own most expressive way she sought to signify her enduring love for him.

A long and rapid run upon a bright summer's day brought Dad, towards evening, at the Magic Inn, which stood hard by the

Border Castle, where dwelt Roddy and his friends. He learned, to his deep regret, that the mother of the three girls was no longer in residence, and that the bathroom had recovered its missing door. Thus much of the Inn's romantic flavour had departed. The place oozed with prosperity. An artillery camp had for months past been pitched in its vicinity, and the officers and thirsty soldiers had poured much red gold—or Treasury Notes—into the landlady's coffers. But for Dad prices remained unchanged, at which he rejoiced mightily. He loved to save money—and then to spend it recklessly. In his bizarre view, this was the best way to get the most out of life and economy. "They have made simply pots of money at the Inn," observed Roddy, who had watched with envy the easy piling-up of wealth in war-time. "Do you think that I ought to keep an Inn when I grow up?"

But Dad, who could not quite visualize his queer, small son as a licensed victualler, explained that the lavish outpourings of war could not last as long as Roddy's youth, and that even magic inns would soon cease to be mines of wealth. "That is a great pity," observed the seeker after riches. "I am not a drinker, as you know, but an inn with carriages and horses, motors, servants, barrels of beer, and lots of things to eat, seems rather a jolly place to live in. I would sooner keep

an inn than a school any day. Everybody seems to make money except you, Dad. There must be something seriously wrong with your kind of business !”

“The fault rests with me, I am afraid,” lamented Dad. “I haven’t the knack of it.”

Dad spent a day at the Inn, and went for a picnic on the moors with Roddy and the other boys. The boys had all decided that he was quite a decent old buffer, and that, in spite of his extreme age, he was still as spry as they make ’em. So he was made free of their most exclusive community. As an exhaustless teller of just the right kind of stories, they agreed that he was sublime, and they regretted exceedingly that Roddy, in this respect, had not inherited his father’s gifts. One boy—he was by universal acclaim the very naughtiest boy in the whole school—proposed the happy expedient of substituting the Storyteller for the Oracle upon that night. It was quite easy, Dad and Roddy need only exchange beds. “Roddy,” he observed, “will enjoy sleeping at the Inn, and we shall enjoy listening to his father’s stories for half the night. I am sure, sir, it would be ripping fun for you, too.”

But the headmaster, to whom Dad rather diffidently conveyed the proud invitation with which he had been honoured, frowned savagely upon it. “My dear man,” said he,

"I have seen you at work, and in about two minutes you shatter the discipline of a whole dormitory. A night of you and my school might just as well be closed for good. Frankly, you are too costly a luxury for these hard times."

Dad, smiling darkly to himself, vowed revenge and took it by filling up Roddy with two or three terrific boy-shaking yarns, compounded of laughter and horror, and straitly enjoined him to retail them with appropriate gestures in his dormitory. This he faithfully did, and the tempestuous racket which ensued, smote upon Dad's gratified ears—he was dining at the Castle whose hospitality he had thus shamelessly abused. He rejoiced exceedingly: first at Wee Roddy's capable discharge of his duties, and secondly at the impossibility of anyone punishing the happy villains during the small fragments which yet remained of the term. "Your small son seems to have been at the bottom of the row," observed the headmaster, when he returned from quelling the riot. "It must have been the effect of your bad example. As a father of boys you strike me as quite preposterous. I hope that you will confine your visits here to one day only in a term. More would spell ruin for the school."

Next morning, about midday, Dad and Roddy dashed off in Jitny, bound for Carlisle and the road to North Wales, where in a

peaceful village by the sea—secure from roving Zeppelins and the shells of submarines—Mother and Little Jane had already installed themselves. The journey over Shap Fell and through Lancaster, Preston, and Chester, was devoid of incident, except for a slight disturbance during their halt for the night at Lancaster. Roddy, excited by the blaze of glory in which he had completed the term, and unaccustomed to the pretentious richness of hotel food—the cooking at the Magic Inn never upset anyone's stomach—had miscalculated his powers of comfortable absorption. When Dad went to his quarters he heard dismal groans issuing from the dressing-room in which a bed had been placed for Roddy.

“I am very ill indeed,” declared that disconsolate hero, “and I shan't be better till my crankcase is washed out very thoroughly.” By means of this mechanical metaphor Roddy signified his desire for a soul-stirring emetic. With some difficulty Dad procured materials for the operation, after which Roddy pronounced himself to be completely cured, and to be again enjoying the rudest health. In the morning he descended in the best of spirits and demanded large quantities of breakfast. “We must be careful, Roddy old chap,” observed Dad. “Go slow with those eggs, or Mother will give us both a severe whipping.”

“No matter,” gallantly cried Roddy. “My crankcase is all right now, and why worry till it goes wrong again. After all, I rather like having it washed out. So does Jitny. We are both of us the better for a dose of paraffin.” This he said, convinced that the ailments of Jitny and himself called for identical prescriptions.

They reached the village by the sea that evening towards sunset, having travelled all day over roads thronged with Bank Holiday traffic. It was Sunday, and except that the press was not quite so severe as a year before, there were few signs that war had devastated Europe for twelve months. Everywhere England was crawling with troops—that was the only visible sign that we were a nation at war. On that Sunday evening the soldiers had temporarily abandoned the worship of Mars for that of Venus, and Dad rejoiced to see so many strong khaki arms about so many buxom waists. Beneath a crust of cynical levity he concealed a very human heart. “Look, Roddy,” he said, “and remember. There before you are the two strongest instincts in the world. Fighting and loving, and the two of them represent humanity as it began and as it will end. I am of the opinion of the French philosopher who said that no man should go to the wars until after that he had provided for his successor.”

"Do you mean," asked Roddy gravely, "that Peter ought to get married?"

"Well, not quite," replied Dad, laughing. "My theories stop short at such a fulfilment as that."

"I hope that he does. It must be great fun to be an uncle. Little Jane says that she doesn't want to be an auntie, she prefers to be a mother."

"Little Jane has many privileges. One of them is to be an utterly shameless female. For my part I am in no hurry to anticipate the future. As a father of sons I am no great success; but as a grandfather I should be merely ridiculous."

"Now, Roddy," said Dad, "while I steer Jitny through these cataracts of cars, motor buses, lovers, and dogs, you look after the names of the streets and the numbers of the houses. We are seeking for a house which is as yet nothing but a name and number on a scrap of paper."

All went well till they found the road which they sought and emerged upon the sea-front, but Roddy could not then be torn from contemplation of the colours which flamed in sky and sea. "Look at that band of liquid green there under the crimson," he cried. "I have never seen anything so splendid!"

"Look at the numbers," roared Dad.

As a pilot Roddy failed utterly, and Dad had ultimately to depend for guidance upon

the shouts of Little Jane, who hung half out of a first-floor window. She was saved from an early death by the grip of Mother upon her abbreviated skirts. "There is number fifteen," said Dad, "and we have arrived safely, but no thanks are due to you, Roddy."

"Oh, that's all right," muttered the absorbed artist; "tell Mother I will come in directly. But I want to see just how those colours deepen as the sun sinks. I may not get another chance. Mother and Little Jane can wait."

Tony appeared a few days later. He was now sixteen, at an age when boys always miss their trains and lose their luggage. Tony had done both these things. He had been paying visits in order to display before an admiring world his youthful person clad in the evening clothes, which he had prevailed upon Dad to buy. He said that the visits necessitated the dinner-jacket, but we have given to the sequence its proper order. He was very much grown up, and the air with which he displayed the proofs of his military textbook, and affected to think lightly of his triumph over publishers, gave Dad no little gratification. Tony's account of his negotiations with the eminent firm which was producing his book was not devoid of humour.

"For six weeks," he said, "they took no notice of my letters. These publisher people are a slack lot. Then I called upon them in

uniform, with my corporal's chevrons, and said that I had been sent by the author to hurry them up. If they did not look jolly slippy, I said, he would take the book elsewhere, and where would they be then? They seemed impressed. Perhaps they thought that an author who employed a full corporal as a messenger must be an A.D.C. at least, if not a complete Redhat. They became frightfully respectful. A day or two later they offered to do the publishing at their own cost and to give me some of the bloated profits. They simply grovel before me now when I go as the author's messenger. It is immense."

Dad read Tony's proofs with some anxiety. He was concerned lest his astute and somewhat unscrupulous son should have too completely over-reached his innocent publishers—who belong to a notoriously unsuspicious and trustful class—but was relieved at the quality of Tony's work. It was quite good—compact, clear, and thorough. During his four years of the O.T.C., he had evidently worked hard and thought deeply. "The sergeant-major," observed Tony, when Dad had finished, "swears by my book. He says that he didn't think I had it all in me."

"No more did I," confessed Dad.

In secret to Mother, Dad took himself to task for having considerably underrated the capacities of his second son. Peter was

incomparably the more brilliant, but this youthful corporal and author could think and plan and execute in a business-like fashion which gave great promise of future usefulness. "Peter is our first," said he, "but I begin to doubt whether I ought to think him our best. I must study this Tony of ours during the tour which we have planned. There are no flies on him. He has secured the best publishers for his wares and actually made them pay for his fun. What sport it will be for us if all our geese turn out to be swans."

"Of course they are swans," replied Mother. "I could have told you that at any time since they were born. You men take a very long time to see the most obvious things."

"I can imagine Tony's pleasure when he forwards to Peter a copy of his book, and the sublimely impertinent letter which will accompany it. For Peter has never yet come near writing a book, still less getting it published at someone else's expense. Tony will make the very most of his priority in enterprise. I would give a great deal to see their correspondence, but doubt whether that privilege will ever be mine. Sometimes I feel that they are both rather suspicious of me."

"It is your own fault," retorted Mother unkindly.

While Dad was awaiting Tony's leisurely

return from his round of visits, he prepared Jitny for the week of touring through the south and west of England which he had promised the great author and himself. A day or two passed—"They are my sons as well as yours," said Mother. "You can't have everything your own way"—and then one morning after breakfast Tony brought round the car, luggage and spare tyres were strapped in place, and the travellers were off. Jitny purred, more cat-like than ever in her sensuous happiness; she rejoiced as much as they did in the prospect of long days of freedom upon the open road. Dad had told her all about it, and she had promised to be very good indeed.

The motorists proposed to lunch upon the borders of Wales at the house of an old friend who had, a week or two earlier, presented the country with a sturdy son. This feat, which to the chief performers always betokens a super-human skill and ingenuity on their part—"There never was such a baby, my dear, since the world began"—became of very special value and importance in time of war, and Dad was not lacking in friendly enthusiasm. Tony was much more interested in the father's approaching departure for the front as an officer of R.A.M.C.

"He is a doctor, of course," explained Dad, "and waited till Maggie's boy was born."

"What a silly thing to wait for!" snapped

Tony, who had become the most insatiable of fire-eaters. "Catch me stopping for that!"

Jitny did not like the Welsh roads. They kicked at her wheels, and jerked her steering-rods, and made her side-slip into pot-holes, and caused her in many ways to suffer intense aggravation. But out of the consideration she bore her owners she put up with these annoyances, and did not sulk more than was due to her self-respect. When the English border was at last crossed she buzzed with relief, and leaped forth upon the fine Shropshire surfaces with all the exuberance of a young colt. If Dad had not meant her to feel young he should not have lavished upon her that beautiful dress of new paint!

While Tony talked with the officer of R.A.M.C., and counted the minutes which still separated him from lunch, Dad went upstairs to Maggie's room, where she lay upon a big couch. No one ever stood upon conventions with Dad. "Maggie, dear," said he, patting her cheek, "you have done a great Imperial work, and have earned my deepest respect. You are blessed among women. Every mother of a son in these days should receive a special vote of thanks from Parliament, accompanied by an appropriate grant in aid. There are only two jobs nowadays which count. One is killing Germans, the other is producing and training up new Englishmen. I mean by this to

include all our peoples throughout the Empire, but I cannot use the artificial word ' Britons '—it always suggests to my mind Druids and naked bodies painted with woad. Your figure, Maggie, is much too pretty to spoil with woad."

"What do you know of my figure, sir?" inquired she, smiling.

"Unhappily nothing," he replied regretfully; "but it looks very nice in that saucy teagown. I should like to be a young father again. During all these long months you have had the War always in your mind, and this infant of yours will surely grow up to be a Happy Warrior. I have said it. My scientific friends laugh at my belief in pre-natal impressions, and assert that there is not a particle of evidence in support of them. But the world of the unscientific does not mind one button; it will go on believing as it has done since the days of Jacob. My wife is a Eugenist and a Pre-Natalist, and she has certainly brought off a decent lot of kids."

"I don't think that I want my boy to be a warrior," observed Maggie, smiling happily. "Not, at least, the killing kind."

"At least he is safe for a long time to come. Whereas my boys—Peter has gone and Tony is straining at the leash. His one prayer is that the War may last till he is a couple of years older."

"Let me see Tony before he goes. He is

a dear. And as for your splendid Big Peter, if my little morsel grows up to be like him I shall be a happy mother. I can hear him coming now; tell me what you think of him."

The Imperial Infant entered at that moment and was transferred to his mother's arms. He howled lustily for food, and the nurse gave Dad a look which he was quick to understand. "His lungs are all right," cried he, jumping up; "and his appetite seems to match them." Then he bent, kissed Maggie's hand, and fled the room. Instantly the hungry cries ceased. "I ought to have got used to them by this time," he murmured as he descended the stairs, "but I cannot endure infants in the pupa stage. Few men can."

At lunch Tony explained to the Sawbones all that he was losing by becoming a non-combatant patcher up of wounds instead of a gallant inflicter of them. "The R.A.M.C.," he observed, polite in tone but bitterly contemptuous in spirit, "are, of course, very useful, but they don't know the first thing about drill. You should see the orderlies marching in fours! It is heart-breaking. I should like to have a squad of them for five minutes, just five little minutes. They would remember me ever afterwards when they heard the Litany." Tony's chest swelled under his uniform tunic, and he felt himself

to be a drill sergeant of truly Prussian frightfulness.

"We do our best," murmured the Sawbones apologetically, "and lots of us get killed. We can't do more than that, can we?"

"Yes," retorted Tony sternly. "You might look smart."

When the moment came to leave, Tony was pleased to unbend and to wish the medical officer the best of luck and a safe return. "Don't expose yourself unnecessarily," warned this authority on war. "You have a wife and child to think of now."

The brave Sawbones did not even smile, for which heroic self-mastery Dad respected him deeply. "Thank you, Tony old man, I will remember," he replied gravely. Then he shook the boy's hand and disappeared into the house rather suddenly. Dad, who was choking, wished that he also had a house in which to take refuge.

It was a pleasant afternoon's run through one of the fairest of England's fair counties, and in the course of it they came upon a huge hutted camp where many battalions of the New Army were quartered. England just then was dotted with these "war stations." While driving through the camp, under the strictest of speed regulations, Dad heard a loud voice calling his name, and stopping he was greeted by the Commander of the Company in which Peter had passed the

first few months of his service. "What are you doing here?" cried both men.

Dad replied first. "I am touring, and on the way shall look in upon Lieutenant Peter, who is at Portsmouth being made into a Marine Gunner."

"Fine boy that of yours!" replied the Major. "One of the keenest youngsters I have ever met, and that *tour de force* in the exam. was tremendous. We were all immensely proud of him. I will tell you a secret. On the day when the surprising result was announced he attended a lecture I was giving in the evening to the whole company. As soon as he appeared all the men jumped to their feet cheering frantically. It was altogether irregular but rather splendid. The boy looked embarrassed—for the first time in his life, I should say. My lecture, after this outbreak, was rather a frost; all the men were itching to crowd around Peter and shake him by the hand. It took him more than an hour to work off the whole two hundred and forty of them, but he stuck at it nobly, and will remember the scene all the days of his life. I skipped out, and all discipline was gone; the men hailed him openly as 'The Brigadier,' and Peter nearly grinned his big head off. At the end he showed the extraordinary power over men which he could exercise at will. When he had shaken hands with the last man, he stopped the noise

by a gesture, formed them instantly into platoons, and as they stood stiffly at attention he thanked them in half a dozen words delivered with the stern air of an inspecting officer. Then he dismissed them to their billets. They went away like lambs. 'Yon's the deil of a laddie,' said the sergeant-major when he told me the story. 'I could greet to see yon leave a gude Hieland Regiment for thae English Marines.' "

"There spoke the true Scot," cried Dad, laughing. "You are most kind to tell me this, Major. Peter said little except that officers and men had been very decent when he left. But what are you doing here in a Shropshire camp?"

"We are all here—Peter's old battalion. We are all aching to go out to France, but the Colonel doesn't expect his Orders till the end of the year."

"It is very rough on you, but I am afraid that Peter will be delighted. He pictured you in France or Flanders killing and being killed, while he was living at Portsmouth in the luxurious security of Marine Barracks. More than once he has come near repenting of his success in leaving you."

"He will be at sea as soon as we get down to business, perhaps much sooner. And his work with the big guns will be ten times more interesting than ours in trenches. He was born for the Regular Service, and could

not possibly have done better than he has. Tell him so from me."

"I will, Major. Good luck and good-bye."

They lay that night at Bridgnorth. Even Tony, who came back to the driving of Jitny like a lover who rejoins a long-lost mistress, agreed that it were folly to spoil a tour through our beautiful England by too much indulgence in mere road-eating. So they planned to cover little more than a hundred miles a day, and to leave to themselves ample leisure for enjoying their travels. Towards the South the road out of Bridgnorth descended in a blood-curdling hairpin, upon which flaring red boards and huge mirrors threatened careless drivers with sudden death. "Many fatal accidents," screamed the boards, but Jitny, secure in fast-holding brakes, smiled at the warnings; she was far too experienced a traveller to be agitated by any hills. That day was the longest of their tour, for the West was calling and the wide smooth roads tempted them to press forward with energy. They passed through Kidderminster and Worcester and ran down to a little town in Gloucestershire, before halting for lunch. Tony's recollections of this little town, where he had spent some time at school years before, were large and generous. It had been for him an immense, even metropolitan, city, but had become sadly shrunken by the passing

of time. At the hotel selected by Tony—"It is a magnificent palace," he declared, "and I am afraid rather expensive for the likes of us"—they could procure only cold "pig-meat," and a grey, tepid mass described as "just a pudding," when they anxiously inquired into its composition. "Just a pudding; a boiled pudding." The visions of eleven become sadly dissipated when one arrives at the immense heights of sixteen! Tony did not enjoy that disconcerting pudding.

Tony took charge himself for the passage of Bristol—he knew it like the palm of his hand, he said—but here also his recollections proved to be vague, and he lost his way quite half a dozen times. Ultimately they made the passage by way of Clifton and the docks at Avonmouth, which even to Dad's ignorance did not seem to be the most direct route.

Once clear of Bristol Jitny gallantly tackled the Mendips, and had her reward in a wild, law-breaking rush over the flats of Sedgmoor into Bridgwater. At Taunton they entered upon a stretch of country apparently given up entirely to the harbourage of mules. Herds, flocks, coveys of mules—we know not the technically correct term—thronged the roads. They marched in most irregular fours, each four being led by an unhappy boy obviously ignorant of the psychology of his charges. As Jitny approached, each four of

mules spread out fanwise, with a boy as the handle, and the small hoofs started to caper backwards at an astonishing speed. Dad soon gave up trying to count the mules, their numbers was seemingly legion. They crowded the roads, and their heads formed an unbroken fringe to the hedges as they gazed from the fields upon the strange world without. At Wellington he learned that the countryside had become a depot for collecting mule transport, and he listened while the merchants in this new form of import discoursed upon its merits and its profits. They were wonderful and beautiful mules, bred in the wide spaces of America, as large as small horses and showing few traces—except in ears and hoofs—of their asinine sires.

The travellers roamed, next day, about their own beautiful land of Devon, to which Dad now returned after many years of exile. It was a very happy reunion, though he found his lovely City of Exeter sadly disfigured by tramways, and the country round about sprinkled with unlovely suburbs of staring brick. But much remained of the Old City upon the Exe, though its conservative motto of "Semper Eadem" scarcely seemed to be the guiding star of its modern citizens. In the afternoon he turned his back upon it and sped away to Dorchester, which, but for far-stretching tentacles crawling forth along the glorious avenues of oak and elm and chest-

nut of the Dorset capital, was as he had known it nearly thirty years earlier.

From Dorchester, Dad and Tony set forth for their beloved New Forest, traversing it through wild torrents of rain which seemed to add softness to its beauty of atmosphere and foliage, and so to Southampton and the roads beyond leading by devious ways into the stronghold of Portsmouth. Here Dad had fully expected to be held up and examined closely as to his credentials; but thanks, perhaps, to Tony's uniform, and to his own and Jitny's obvious integrity, he passed in and out of the Fleet's headquarters without check or word.

In Gosport, close to the ferry which was to transport them to the Hard of Portsea, where Peter awaited their arrival, they suffered their first disaster. With a resounding clap, which brought the people rushing from their houses—had Zeppelins dared at last to face the Archibalds of Portsmouth?—the off-front tyre burst. After running without a failure for eighteen months it had given up the ghost, and Dad bent to the task of fitting a new tyre while Tony sought a telephone office to warn Peter of the delay. As it happened, Peter, deeply learned in cars and their vagaries, had not taken their travel schedule very seriously, so that they had ample time to repair damages, reach Portsmouth, change—Tony hurriedly donned

mufti: "A corporal cannot dine with an officer," declared this punctilious martinet—before Peter dashed up to the hotel upon a pretty little two-stroke motor bicycle which he had, of course, ravished from a comparative stranger. Big Peter was always true to type, and it is a perpetual surprise to Dad how his big son manages to keep himself out of prison. Where anything with a motor is concerned he has no respect whatever for the sacredness of ownership.

Dad had chosen to stop at the same hotel where he and his wife had rested a few months before Peter was born, a little sentimental reminder of the days when he was a father only in prospect. "You have been here before, Peter!" said Dad, when he told his son, and the stalwart young officer for a moment became silently reflective. "How frightfully interesting," he observed, "for you and for me and for Mother! I will send her a picture postcard of the hotel at once."

Peter's uniform of good Navy blue was a very pleasing sight for eyes grown rather weary of perpetual khaki of every possible and impossible shade, and Dad loved to look upon the Artillery badges which indicated his Peter's proud service. He had not seen him since the boy had definitely joined the Blue Corps. "You are really satisfied at last, old man?" he inquired anxiously.

"Perfectly! I wouldn't be anywhere else

now, though I do grumble sometimes at our freedom from the worst of the risks of war. My super-Dreadnought is of the very latest perfection, her guns are unapproachable, and her turrets impregnable. She will go about surrounded by destroyers lest submarines might scratch her sacred paint, and she has such a honeycomb of compartments that it would take tons of wet guncotton or T.N.T. to let much water into her. But I still have hopes of that last great fight, the Battle of the Giants."

Dad told of his meeting with the Major and what he had said.

Peter chuckled joyously. "So they haven't gone out yet? Good business. No one can say now that I am a shirker."

"Does anyone say it, old man?"

"Of course not. But I think it sometimes, which is worse."

Peter at dinner told of his gunnery training, now nearing its close, and of his rapid progress through all the many technical courses which go to the equipment of a Blue Marine. "There is an extraordinary mysticism about big guns," said he, "which is unutterably fascinating. They seem to have deep-thinking minds of their own. And the range finding and keeping mechanism is uncanny. I mustn't tell you Naval secrets, but our system of range-finding and fire control is so perfect, that when travelling at full speed we can

pump salvos without fail upon the decks of an enemy, a dozen miles distant, travelling also at full speed."

"It seems beyond belief."

"Yet we can do it. The mystery and wonder of it all used to keep me awake at night. But now I read the Iliad before turning in, and its concrete simplicity comes as a great relief. Goethe's poems, too, are fascinating things, and I have a gramophone on which I solace my mind with unlimited Wagner."

"You are still a bit of a Hun, I see," put in Dad, laughing.

"Oh, I have forgiven Goethe and Wagner for being Germans. They are safely dead. It is only the live ones that I yearn to destroy."

Tony had been very silent during dinner. His disciplined mind could not forget Peter the officer in Peter the brother. He had affected to scoff at his big brother's late temporary rank, but his eminence now as a pukka soldier was unforgettable. Peter turned to him with that beautiful air of kindly condescension which always delighted Dad, and inquired, "Well, kid, how goes your work for the Navy Pay Department?"

"It's off," replied Tony. This was news to Dad.

"Off?" cried Peter. "What is the latest effort, then?"

"I want a fighting service," remarked

Tony, who had evidently given this important subject the most serious thought. "And I have decided on the Field Artillery. Next June I shall be seventeen and I shall have a shot at Woolwich. It will be quite cheap for Dad, now that all the fees have been suspended."

"I am sorry to be a wet blanket," put in Dad, to whom this revised programme was a new thing, "but the Regular Army for you is quite beyond me. We are a remarkable people. In order to encourage bright young men to join the Army as a profession, we carefully provide a system which makes it impossible for them to live on their pay. In the Field Artillery I should have to allow you at least £100 a year for ten years. When Peter was a temporary lieutenant of infantry he was quite well off; his pay and his allowances for mess, camp equipment and uniform were ample, and he cost me nothing after he was gazetted. The country needed temporaries in thousands, and had to pay them properly. But the moment he became a regular Blue Marine his pay was cut in half and his expenses doubled, and I had to buy his uniforms myself. He costs me now as much as he would have done at Oxford. It will be better when he gets to sea, for the Navy, thank Heaven, is a real profession in which officers can and do live on what they earn. But the Army in peace-time has so

much about it of social swank, that it is an impossible career for a young man whose friends cannot afford to keep him for years and years. You can have any branch of the Sea Service which you like, Tony. The Pay Department next year or the Public School Cadetships for the Navy the year after, or Peter's service. You may have a shot at all of them if you like. But just get it well into your head that the Army costs young officers twice as much to live in as the Navy, and order your plans accordingly. I have spoken."

Tony's face wilted during this speech and Peter rather unkindly laughed. "Dad is right," said he. "My expenses just now are simply wicked. My pay is a mere drop in the bucket. In peace-time it would have been even worse."

"I shall have to think," muttered poor Tony miserably. "I must be in this War somehow. And if I wait too long they may want to conscript me. Fancy me being conscripted! I would sooner be a Marine!"

Dad and Peter laughed heartily. "Cheer up, old man!" cried Dad. "You shan't suffer the awful shame of being fetched. You shall have any service except the Regular Army. The trouble with you is really the same as with me. I am much too old for anything but a Volunteer Corps and a 'G.R.' brassard, and you are too young for

anything but the O.T.C. We are the victims of Anno Domini. If the War lasts long enough to satisfy your thirst for German blood, it will last far too long for the rest of the world. So your position is rather difficult."

"I do think that you and Mother have managed things rather badly," cried Tony passionately. "I might have been only one year younger than Peter instead of my beastly two years and nine months. Then I should have been eighteen and old enough for a commission. It is perfectly sickening!"

"But in that case, though I should have had a second son of eighteen, he would not have been you, Tony. It is this interloper who would have been old enough for a commission, not you!"

Tony was startled by this unexpected declaration, and retired into a corner to turn it over in his mind. The thought that the body of the unborn second son might not have been inhabited by his own burning soul was a veritable agony. Poor Tony's brave heart was too old for those obdurate sixteen years of his. But of what use to have been eighteen and to have been someone else—possibly a shirker! Poor Tony!

And while Tony glowered and wrestled with his own painful problems, Dad and Peter fell into talk of the future. If he survived

the War, Peter declared his intention to go on to the Army Staff College, and to make of his career a real profession. Dad heartily approved, and rejoiced to feel sure that whatsoever Peter chose to plan, that he would inevitably succeed in carrying out. Peter had so shiningly proved his capacity during this last year of work that Dad had no fears at all as to the adequacy of his future. And as he looked at the clear-cut face of his big son, a face which took on so readily the set sternness of command, and then at the gloomy visage of Tony, who, in his corner, wrestled with those terrible obstacles of years which cut him off from his ardent dreams of service, he felt almost content with the part which he himself had played in the world. "I am a poor thing," thought he, "but I am made great in the lives of my sons."

At length Peter rose to depart through the dark streets of Portsmouth on his stolen mount, and Dad and Tony helped him to put light to his lamps and to get the engine going. "If you can get leave before you join your ship, pay us a visit, old man," said Dad. "All expenses paid."

"To be sure I will," cried Peter, swinging into the saddle of his roaring steed. "After so handsome an offer I will do my best to get leave."

He was gone. And the next morning Dad

and Tony left too, to travel by Winchester and Oxford to Banbury, and thence to strike across through Stratford and Kidderminster to Shrewsbury. Tony had recovered his high spirits upon the open road, but Dad knew that the shadows were never far from his mind, and that for him the next two years would be full of unhappiness.

On the last day of their tour they entered Wales and drove through the Vale of Llangollen, lovely in the mists, and through the wooded glens of Bettws-y-Coed, and so on till the sea opened out before them, and Mother and Little Jane, rushing forth, fell upon their dirty bosoms. Wee Roddy stood aloof. He desired to suspend judgment upon the tour until, with all the evidence of fortune and misfortune before him, he could finally pronounce upon its merits.

"Oh, Daddy darling," screamed Little Jane, "Peter and Tony and Roddy have all been for tours with you in Jitny. When will it be my turn?"

"When you can dress yourself without help," said Mother, "and sleep in a room alone without yelling out for me half a dozen times during the night."

"I will learn at once," said Little Jane, "like I did to tell the time when you promised me a watch. And if I yell out in the night, strike me sky-blue scarlet!"

“The colours are most appropriate,” remarked Dad. “You and I, my Jane, will scorch till all is blue, and when on our travels will paint the whole world red.”

“Glory Hallelujah !” cried Little Jane.

CHAPTER XII

BIG PETER GOES TO SEA

ONE evening late in the autumn a message from Big Peter flashed over the long wires stretching from the South. "I have leave, expect me at breakfast." And shortly after eight o'clock, upon a dark, forbidding morning, he arrived true to his promise. Dad and Mother were rather grieved at first to see that he had put on the field-service khaki of his Corps, in place of their beloved blue, but he explained that blue was wasted upon the ignorant eyes of those of the North. To them his official sea-kit seemed to be an obscure cross between the uniform of a cinema-house attendant and a captain of the Salvation Army. So they forgave him the khaki, the more readily when they beheld upon his sleeves that lost second star which had at last been restored to him. Peter once more was a full Lieutenant! His ship was "somewhere" in a North Sea port, and he was under Orders to join her there upon the expiry of his leave. The moment was at hand when, his long probation ended, he would enter into his turret kingdom. She

was a Dreadnought, he said, of the most exalted superness, an engine of terror of the very latest model, at the roar of whose guns the sea and sky were rent, and at whose coming the hearts of Germans, hiding far away, turned sick with fear—she was, in short, a most colossal IT. Dad rejoiced at the boy's enthusiasm for his ship, and rejoiced, too, that at the long last Peter had won his opportunity to prove his worth in war.

"When the wind blows I shall think of you, out there in the North Sea!" murmured Mother. She would think of him always, poor thing; sleeping or waking he would never be far from her thoughts.

"We shall probably then be in port," observed Peter, laughing. "The big ships never put out when the sea is at all rough; they might get wet."

The week which Peter spent at home was indescribably filthy as to weather, but in other respects very bright and happy. The thick snow denied the roads to Jitny, and the fog and frost made the city streets almost impassable, but no word of complaint came from Big Peter. He was never hard to please, and never less than now, when he always saw before him, as in a vision, his huge ship bristling with the great guns in the use of which he had learned to be a master.

During those last days of fog Peter wriggled

about busying himself with the purchase of oilskins, sou'westers, and sea boots. "It looks well to have them," he said, grinning, "but that is about all the use they will be to me. But one must play up to the part of a bold sea-dog." For one who held that Dreadnoughts never put to sea when the weather was at all rough, he certainly did himself handsomely in weather-proof clothing.

Dad greatly enjoyed himself in hunting up advertisements of ear-protectors and life-saving waistcoats. It will not be his fault if Peter becomes deaf from the roar of guns and the bursts of shells, and goes down unaided into the deep waters when a torpedo shatters the massively protected bottom of his vessel. Peter said that he was much more likely to be run over by a taxi-cab—"I detest and dread those beastly motors when I am myself on foot," said he—and he declared that in comparison with the unlit streets of London, a Dreadnought was a haven of blissful security.

So a week slipped away, and then Peter—in the blue of his Sea Service—passed out of the fog and grime of the city into the bright sunshine of the outside country. The change seemed to typify that other and greater change which had fulfilled itself in his life. He was passing, as the train bore him somewhither on the north-east coast, from the fog, the fumes, the filth, and the limitless confusion

and indecision of fighting upon land, to the clean air and wide spaces of the sea and to the simplicity, the clarity, and the brief annihilating decisiveness of its warfare. The land has grown too small for the millions which wrestle upon its surface, but the wide sea will always give to England space in which to destroy, and depths in which to bury, any rash foe who dares to measure guns and ships and men with her.

Dinner that evening was a silent meal. The house seemed to be very empty. Tony and Wee Roddy were away at school, Little Jane was—or pretended to be—asleep upstairs, and now Peter's unoccupied chair had been pushed back against the wall. Dad rose, put the chair back in place, filled glasses for his wife and himself, and then standing, pledged in silence the spirit of his gallant son.

But though Mother and Dad were very quiet they were not unhappy. They had, in their fumbling but honest way, tried to play their part in the country's work. To them now it seemed that everything in the nineteen years of Peter's bright life had led inevitably up to this moment. His early training at home, his happy-go-lucky but always brilliant passage through a series of schools, his prowess as an athlete and as a motorist, his work in the O.T.C. and in the Highland battalion, his triumphant entry into

the Blue Corps, and his graduation as an accomplished officer of Artillery. Everything fitted into its place in the fore-ordained scheme of his life. For nineteen years his work had been waiting for him, and now at last he was ready, fit, and glad to take it up.

“Lucky, lucky Peter!” murmured Dad, as he thought of this coming together of the work and the man. “The time, and the place, and the loved one, all together! The War, the great ship, and the trained man! What would I not give to be young like him and to be in his place to-night!”

“If this War had broken out a few years ago,” sighed Mother, “I should have kept all my sons.”

“Yes,” replied Dad grimly, “but you would have lost your husband!”





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